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LITERARY STUDIES

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LITERARY STUDIES

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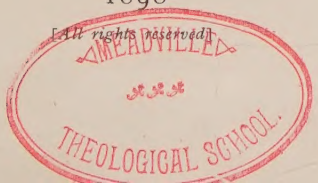

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LITERARY STUDIES.

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY.[1]

(1856.)

This is a marvellous book. Everybody has read it, and every one has read it with pleasure. It has little advantage of subject. When the volumes came out, an honest man said, "I suppose something happened between the years 1689 and 1697; but what happened I do not know". Every one knows now. No period with so little obvious interest will henceforth be so familiarly known. Only a most felicitous and rather curious genius could and would shed such a light on such an age. If in the following pages we seem to cavil and find fault, let it be remembered, that the business of a critic is criticism; that it is *not* his business to be thankful; that he must attempt an estimate rather than a eulogy.

Macaulay[2] seems to have in a high degree the temperament most likely to be that of a historian. This may be summarily defined as the temperament which inclines men to take an interest in actions as contrasted with objects, and in past actions in preference to present actions. We should

[1] *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second.* By Thomas Babington Macaulay. Longmans.

[2] This paper was of course published before Lord Macaulay received his peerage.

expand our meaning. Some people are unfortunately born scientific. They take much interest in the objects of nature. They feel a curiosity about shells, snails, horses, butterflies. They are delighted at an ichthyosaurus, and excited at a polyp; they are learned in minerals, vegetables, animals; they have skill in fishes, and attain renown in pebbles: in the highest cases they know the great causes of grand phenomena, can indicate the courses of the stars or the current of the waves; but in every case their minds are directed not to the actions of man, but to the scenery amidst which he lives; not to the inhabitants of this world, but to the world itself; not to what most resembles themselves, but to that which is most unlike. What compels men to take an interest in what they do take an interest in, is commonly a difficult question—for the most part, indeed, it is an insoluble one; but in this case it would seem to have a negative cause—to result from the absence of an intense and vivid nature. The inclination of mind which abstracts the attention from that in which it can feel sympathy to that in which it cannot, seems to arise from a want of sympathy. A tendency to devote the mind to trees and stones as much as to, or in preference to, men and women, appears to imply that the intellectual qualities, the abstract reason, and the inductive scrutiny which can be applied equally to trees and to men, to stones and to women, predominate over the more special qualities solely applicable to our own race,—the keen love, the eager admiration, the lasting hatred, the lust of rule which fasten men's interests on people and to people. As a confirmation of this, we see that, even in the greatest cases, scientific men have been calm men. Their actions are unexceptionable; scarcely a spot stains their excellence: if a doubt is to be thrown on their character, it would be rather that they were insensible to the temptations than that they were involved in the offences of ordinary men. An

aloofness and abstractedness cleave to their greatness. There is a coldness in their fame. We think of Euclid as of fine ice; we admire Newton as we admire the Peak of Teneriffe. Even the intensest labours, the most remote triumphs of the abstract intellect, seem to carry us into a region different from our own—to be in a *terra incognita* of pure reasoning, to cast a chill on human glory.

We know that the taste of most persons is quite opposite. The tendency of man is to take an interest in man, and almost in man only. The world has a vested interest in itself. Analyse the minds of the crowd of men, and what will you find? Something of the outer earth, no doubt,—odd geography, odd astronomy, doubts whether Scutari is in the Crimea, investigations whether the moon is less or greater than Jupiter; some idea of herbs, more of horses; ideas, too, more or less vague, of the remote and supernatural,—notions which the tongue cannot speak, which it would seem the world would hardly bear if thoroughly spoken. Yet, setting aside these which fill the remote corners and lesser outworks of the brain, the whole stress and vigour of the ordinary faculties is expended on their possessor and his associates, on the man and on his fellows. In almost all men, indeed, this is not simply an intellectual contemplation; we not only look on, but act. The impulse to busy ourselves with the affairs of men goes further than the simple attempt to know and comprehend them: it warms us with a further life; it incites us to stir and influence those affairs; its animated energy will not rest till it has hurried us into toil and conflict. At this stage the mind of the historian, as we abstractedly fancy it, naturally breaks off: it has more interest in human affairs than the naturalist; it instinctively selects the actions of man for occupation and scrutiny, in preference to the habits of fishes or the structure of stones; but it has not so much vivid interest in them as the warm and active

man. To know is sufficient for it; it can bear not to take a part. A want of impulse seems born with the disposition. To be constantly occupied about the actions of others; to have constantly presented to your contemplation and attention events and occurrences memorable only as evincing certain qualities of mind and will, which very qualities in a measure you feel within yourself, and yet to be without an impulse to exhibit them in the real world, "which is the world of all of us";[1] to contemplate, yet never act; "to have the House before you," and yet to be content with the reporters' gallery,—shows a chill impassiveness of temperament, a sluggish insensibility to ardent impulse, a heavy immobility under ordinary emotion. The image of the stout Gibbon placidly contemplating the animated conflicts, the stirring pleadings of Fox and Burke, watching a revolution and heavily taking no part in it, gives an idea of the historian as he is likely to be. "Why," it is often asked, "is history dull? It is a narrative of life, and life is of all things the most interesting." The answer is, that it is written by men too dull to take the common interest in life, in whom languor predominates over zeal, and sluggishness over passion.

Macaulay is not dull, and it may seem hard to attempt to bring him within the scope of a theory which is so successful in explaining dulness. Yet, in a modified and peculiar form, we can perhaps find in his remarkable character unusually distinct traces of the insensibility which we ascribe to the historian. The means of scrutiny are ample. Macaulay has not spent his life in a corner; if posterity should refuse—of course they will not refuse—to read a line of his writings, they would yet be sought out by studious inquirers, as those of a man of high political position, great notoriety, and greater oratorical power. We are not therefore obliged, as in so many cases even among contemporaries, to search for

[1] Wordsworth: "The Prelude," book xi.

the author's character in his books alone; we are able from other sources to find out his character, and then apply it to explain the peculiarities of his works. Macaulay has exhibited many high attainments, many dazzling talents, much singular and well-trained power; but the quality which would most strike the observers of the interior man is what may be called his *in*experiencing nature. Men of genius are in general distinguished by their extreme susceptibility to external experience. Finer and softer than other men, every exertion of their will, every incident of their lives, influences them more deeply than it would others. Their essence is at once finer and more impressible; it receives a distincter mark, and receives it more easily than the souls of the herd. From a peculiar sensibility, the man of genius bears the stamp of life commonly more clearly than his fellows; even casual associations make a deep impression on him: examine his mind, and you may discern his fortunes. Macaulay has nothing of this. You could not tell what he has been. His mind shows no trace of change. What he is, he was; and what he was, he is. He early attained a high development, but he has not increased it since; years have come, but they have whispered little; as was said of the second Pitt, "He never grew, he was cast". The volume of speeches which he has published places the proof of this in every man's hand. His first speeches are as good as his last; his last scarcely richer than his first. He came into public life at an exciting season; he shared of course in that excitement, and the same excitement still quivers in his mind. He delivered marvellous rhetorical exercises on the Reform Bill when it passed; he speaks of it with rhetorical interest even now. He is still the man of '32. From that era he looks on the past. He sees "Old Sarum" in the seventeenth century, and Gatton in the civil wars. You may fancy an undertone. The Norman barons

commenced the series of reforms which "*we* consummated"; Hampden was "preparing for the occasion in which I had a part"; William "for the debate in which I took occasion to observe". With a view to that era everything begins; up to that moment everything ascends. That was the "fifth act" of the human race; the remainder of history is only an afterpiece. All this was very natural at the moment; nothing could be more probable than that a young man of the greatest talents, entering at once into important life at a conspicuous opportunity, should exaggerate its importance; he would fancy it was the "crowning achievement," the greatest "in the tide of time". But the singularity is, that he should retain the idea now; that years have brought no influence, experience no change. The events of twenty years have been full of rich instruction on the events of twenty years ago; but they have not instructed him. His creed is a fixture. It is the same on his peculiar topic—on India. Before he went there he made a speech on the subject; Lord Canterbury, who must have heard a million speeches, said it was the best that he had ever heard. It is difficult to fancy that so much vivid knowledge could be gained from books—from horrible Indian treatises; that such imaginative mastery should be possible without actual experience. Not forgetting, or excepting, the orations of Burke, it was perhaps as remarkable a speech as was ever made on India by an Englishman who had not been in India. Now he has been there he speaks no better—rather worse; he spoke excellently without experience, he speaks no better with it,—if anything, it rather puts him out. His speech on the Indian charter a year or two ago was not finer than that on the charter of 1833. Before he went to India he recommended that writers should be examined in the classics; after being in India he recommended that they should be examined in the same way. He did not say he had seen the place in the meantime; he

did not think that had anything to do with it. You could never tell from any difference in his style what he had seen, or what he had not seen. He is so insensible to passing objects, that they leave no distinctive mark, no intimate peculiar trace.

Such a man would naturally think literature more instructive than life. Hazlitt said of Mackintosh, "He might like to read an *account* of India; but India itself, with its burning, shining face, was a mere blank, an endless waste to him. Persons of this class have no more to say to a plain matter of fact staring them in the face than they have to say to a *hippopotamus*."[1] This was a keen criticism on Sir James, savouring of the splenetic mind from which it came. As a complete estimate, it would be a most unjust one of Macaulay; but we know that there is a whole class of minds which prefers the literary delineation of objects to the actual eyesight of them. To some life is difficult. An insensible nature, like a rough hide, resists the breath of passing things; an unobserving retina in vain depicts whatever a quicker eye does not explain. But any one can understand a book; the work is done, the facts observed, the formulæ suggested, the subjects classified. Of course it needs labour, and a following fancy, to peruse the long lucubrations and descriptions of others; but a fine detective sensibility is unnecessary; type is plain, an earnest attention will follow it and know it. To this class Macaulay belongs: and he has characteristically maintained that dead authors are more fascinating than living people.

"Those friendships," he tells us, "are exposed to no danger from the occurrences by which other attachments are weakened or dissolved. Time glides by; fortune is inconstant; tempers are soured; bonds which seemed indissoluble are daily sundered by interest, by emulation, or by caprice. But no such cause can affect the silent converse which we hold

[1] Essay in the *Spirit of the Age*.

with the highest of human intellects. That placid intercourse is disturbed by no jealousies or resentments. These are the old friends who are never seen with new faces; who are the same in wealth and in poverty, in glory and in obscurity. With the dead there is no rivalry. In the dead there is no change. Plato is never sullen. Cervantes is never petulant. Demosthenes never comes unseasonably. Dante never stays too long. No difference of political opinion can alienate Cicero. No heresy can excite the horror of Bossuet." [1]

But Bossuet is dead; and Cicero was a Roman; and Plato wrote in Greek. Years and manners separate us from the great. After dinner, Demosthenes *may* come unseasonably; Dante *might* stay too long. *We* are alienated from the politician, and have a horror of the theologian. Dreadful idea, having Demosthenes for an intimate friend! He had pebbles in his mouth; he was always urging action; he spoke such good Greek; we cannot dwell on it,—it is too much. Only a mind impassive to our daily life, unalive to bores and evils, to joys and sorrows, incapable of the deepest sympathies, a prey to print, could imagine it. The mass of men have stronger ties and warmer hopes. The exclusive devotion to books tires. We require to love and hate, to act and live.

It is not unnatural that a person of this temperament should preserve a certain aloofness even in the busiest life. Macaulay has ever done so. He has been in the thick of political warfare, in the van of party conflict. Whatever a keen excitability would select for food and opportunity, has been his; but he has not been excited. He has never thrown himself upon action, he has never followed trivial details with an anxious passion. He has ever been a man for a great occasion. He was by nature a *deus ex machinâ*. Somebody has had to fetch him. His heart was in Queen Anne's time. When he came, he spoke as Lord Halifax

[1] Essay on "Bacon".

might have spoken. Of course, it may be contended that this is the *eximia ars;* that this solitary removed excellence is particularly and essentially sublime. But, simply and really, greater men have been more deeply "immersed in matter".[1] The highest eloquence quivers with excitement; there is life-blood in the deepest actions; a man like Stafford seems flung upon the world. An orator should never talk like an observatory; no coldness should strike upon the hearer.

It is characteristic also that Macaulay should be continually thinking of posterity. In general, that expected authority is most ungrateful; those who think of it most, it thinks of least. The way to secure its favour is, to give vivid essential pictures of the life before you; to leave a fresh glowing delineation of the scene to which you were born, of the society to which you have peculiar access. This is gained, not by thinking of your posterity, but by living in society; not by poring on what is to be, but by enjoying what is. That spirit of thorough enjoyment which pervades the great delineators of human life and human manners, was not caused by "being made after supper, out of a cheeseparing";[2] it drew its sustenance from a relishing, enjoying, sensitive life, and the flavour of the description is the reality of that enjoyment. Of course this is not so in science. You may leave a name by an abstract discovery, without having led a vigorous existence; yet what a name is this! Taylor's theorem will go down to posterity,—possibly its discoverer was for ever dreaming and expecting it would; but what does posterity know of the deceased Taylor? *Nominis umbra*[3] is rather a compliment; for it is not

[1] *Locke on the Human Understanding:* book iv., chapter iii., 1, 2.

[2] "2 King Henry IV.," iii. 2.

[3] *Stat nominis umbra;* the famous motto of Junius. (Forrest Morgan.)

substantial enough to have a shadow. But in other walks, —say in political oratory, which is the part of Macaulay's composition in which his value for posterity's opinion is most apparent,—the way to interest posterity is to think but little of it. What gives to the speeches of Demosthenes the interest they have? The intense, vivid, glowing interest of the speaker in all that he is speaking about. Philip is not a person whom "posterity will censure," but the man "whom I hate": the matter in hand not one whose interest depends on the memory of men, but in which an eager intense nature would have been absorbed, if there had been no posterity at all, on which he wished to deliver his own soul. A *casual* character, so to speak, is natural to the most intense words; externally, even, they will interest the "after world" more for having interested the present world; they must have a life of *some* place and *some* time before they can have one of all space and all time. Macaulay's oratory is the very opposite of this. Schoolboyish it is not, for it is the oratory of a very sensible man; but the theme of a schoolboy is not more devoid of the salt of circumstance. The speeches on the Reform Bill have been headed, "Now, a man came up from college and spoke thus"; and, like a college man, he spoke rather to the abstract world than to the present. He knew no more of the people who actually did live in London than of people who would live in London, and there was, therefore, no reason for speaking to one more than to the other. After years of politics, he speaks so still. He looks on a question (he says) as posterity will look on it; he appeals from this to future generations; he regards existing men as painful prerequisites of great-grandchildren. This seems to proceed, as has been said, from a distant and unimpressible nature. But it is impossible to deny that it has one great advantage: it has made him take pains. A man who speaks to people a thousand years off, will naturally

speak carefully: he tries to be heard over the clang of ages, over the rumours of myriads. Writing for posterity is like writing on foreign post paper: you cannot say to a man at Calcutta what you would say to a man at Hackney; you think "the yellow man is a very long way off; this is fine paper, it will go by a ship"; so you try to say something worthy of the ship, something noble, which will keep and travel. Writers like Macaulay, who think of future people, have a respect for future people. Each syllable is solemn, each word distinct. No author trained to periodical writing has so little of its slovenliness and its imperfection.

This singularly constant contemplation of posterity has coloured his estimate of social characters. He has no toleration for those great men in whom a lively sensibility to momentary honours has prevailed over a consistent reference to the posthumous tribunal. He is justly severe on Lord Bacon:—

"In his library, all his rare powers were under the guidance of an honest ambition, of an enlarged philanthropy, of a sincere love of truth. There no temptation drew him away from the right course. Thomas Aquinas could pay no fees, Duns Scotus could confer no peerages. The 'Master of the Sentences'[1] had no rich reversions in his gift. Far different was the situation of the great philosopher when he came forth from his study and his laboratory to mingle with the crowds which filled the galleries of Whitehall. In all that crowd there was no man equally qualified to render great and lasting services to mankind. But in all that crowd there was not a heart more set on things which no man ought to suffer to be necessary to his happiness,—on things which can often be obtained only by the sacrifice of integrity and honour. To be the leader of the human race in the career of improvement, to found on the ruins of ancient intellectual dynasties a more prosperous and more enduring empire, to be revered to the latest generations as the most illustrious among the benefactors of mankind,—all this was within his reach. But all this availed him nothing, while some quibbling special pleader was

[1] Peter the Lombard, author of a famous collection of "Sentences," from the Church fathers. (Forrest Morgan.)

promoted before him to the bench,—while some heavy country gentleman took precedence of him by virtue of a purchased coronet, —while some pander, happy in a fair wife, could obtain a more cordial salute from Buckingham,—while some buffoon, versed in all the latest scandal of the Court, could draw a louder laugh from James."

Yet a less experience, or a less opportunity of experience, would have warned a mind more observant that the bare desire for long posthumous renown is but a feeble principle in common human nature. Bacon had as much of it as most men. The keen excitability to this world's temptations must be opposed by more exciting impulses, by more retarding discouragements, by conscience, by religion, by fear. If you would vanquish earth, you must "invent heaven". It is the fiction of a cold abstractedness that the possible respect of unseen people can commonly be more desired than the certain homage of existing people.

In a more conspicuous manner the chill nature of the most brilliant among English historians is shown in his defective dealing with the passionate eras of our history. He has never been attracted, or not proportionally attracted, by the singular mixture of heroism and slavishness, of high passion and base passion, which mark the Tudor period. The defect is apparent in his treatment of a period on which he has written powerfully—the time of the civil wars. He has never in the highest manner appreciated either of the two great characters—the Puritan and the Cavalier—which are the form and life of those years. What historian, indeed, has ever estimated the Cavalier character? There is Clarendon—the grave, rhetorical, decorous lawyer—piling words, congealing arguments,—very stately, a little grim. There is Hume—the Scotch metaphysician—who has made out the best case for such people as never were, for a Charles who never died, for a Strafford who would never have been attainted,—a saving, calculating North-countryman,—fat,

impassive,—who lived on eightpence a day. What have these people to do with an enjoying English gentleman? It is easy for a doctrinaire to bear a post-mortem examination,—it is much the same whether he be alive or dead; but not so with those who live during their life, whose essence is existence, whose being is in animation. There seem to be some characters who are not made for history, as there are some who are not made for old age. A Cavalier is always young. The buoyant life arises before us rich in hope, strong in vigour, irregular in action; men young and ardent, framed in the "prodigality of nature";[1] open to every enjoyment, alive to every passion; eager, impulsive; brave without discipline; noble without principle; prizing luxury, despising danger, capable of high sentiment, but in each of whom the

> "Addiction was to courses vain;
> His companies unlettered, rude and shallow,
> His hours filled up with riots, banquets, sports,
> And never noted in him any study,
> Any retirement, any sequestration
> From open haunts and popularity."[2]

We see these men setting forth or assembling to defend their King and Church; and we see it without surprise; a rich daring loves danger; a deep excitability likes excitement. If we look around us, we may see what is analogous. Some say that the battle of the Alma was won by the "uneducated gentry"; the "uneducated gentry" would be Cavaliers now. The political sentiment is part of the character. The essence of Toryism is enjoyment. Talk of the ways of spreading a wholesome Conservatism throughout this country: give painful lectures, distribute weary tracts (and perhaps this is as well—you may be able to give an argumentative answer to a few objections, you may diffuse a distinct notion of the dignified dulness of politics); but as far

[1] "King Richard III.," i. 2. [2] "Henry V.," i. 1.

as communicating and establishing your creed are concerned —try a little pleasure. The way to keep up old customs is, to enjoy old customs; the way to be satisfied with the present state of things is, to enjoy that state of things. Over the "Cavalier" mind this world passes with a thrill of delight; there is an exultation in a daily event, zest in the "regular thing," joy at an old feast. Sir Walter Scott is an example of this. Every habit and practice of old Scotland was inseparably in his mind associated with genial enjoyment. To propose to touch one of her institutions, to abolish one of those practices, was to touch a personal pleasure—a point on which his mind reposed, a thing of memory and hope. So long as this world is this world, will a buoyant life be the proper source of an animated Conservatism. The "Church-and-King" enthusiasm has even a deeper connection with the Cavaliers. Carlyle has said, in his vivid way, "Two or three young gentlemen have said, 'Go to, I will *make* a religion'". This is the exact opposite of what the irregular, enjoying man can think or conceive. What! is he, with his untrained mind and his changeful heart and his ruleless practice, to create a creed? Is the gushing life to be asked to construct a cistern? Is the varying heart to be its own master, the evil practice its own guide? Sooner will a ship invent its own rudder, devise its own pilot, than the eager being will find out the doctrine which is to restrain him. The very intellect is a type of the confusion of the soul. It has little arguments on a thousand subjects, hearsay sayings, original flashes, small and bright, struck from the heedless mind by the strong impact of the world. And it has nothing else. It has no systematic knowledge; it has a hatred of regular attention. What can an understanding of this sort do with refined questioning or subtle investigation? It is obliged in a sense by its very nature to take what comes; it is overshadowed in a manner by the religion to

which it is born; its conscience tells it that it owes obedience to something; it craves to worship something; that something, in both cases, it takes from the past. "Thou hast not chosen me, but I have chosen thee," might his faith say to a believer of this kind. A certain bigotry is altogether natural to him. His creed seems to him a primitive fact, as certain and evident as the stars. The political faith (for it is a faith) of these persons is of a kind analogous. The virtue of loyalty assumes in them a passionate aspect, and overflows, as it were, all the intellect which belongs to the topic. This virtue, this need of our nature, arises, as political philosophers tell us, from the conscious necessity which man is under of obeying an external moral rule. We feel that we are by nature and by the constitution of all things under an obligation to conform to a certain standard, and we seek to find or to establish in the sphere without, an authority which shall enforce it, shall aid us in compelling others and also in mastering ourselves. When a man impressed with this principle comes in contact with the institution of civil government as it now exists and as it has always existed, he finds what he wants—he discovers an authority; and he feels bound to submit to it. We do not, of course, mean that all this takes place distinctly and consciously in the mind of the person; on the contrary, the class of minds most subject to its influence are precisely those which have in general the least defined and accurate consciousness of their own operations, or of what befalls them. In matter of fact, they find themselves under the control of laws and of a polity from the earliest moment that they can remember, and they obey it from habit and custom years before they know why. Only in later life, when distinct thought is from an outward occurrence forced upon them, do they feel the necessity of some such power; and in proportion to their passionate and impulsive disposition they feel it the more. The law has in

a less degree on them the same effect which military discipline has in a greater. It braces them to defined duties, and subjects them to a known authority. Quieter minds find this authority in an internal conscience; but in riotous natures its still small voice is lost if it be not echoed in loud harsh tones from the firm and outer world:—

> "Their breath is agitation, and their life
> A storm whereon they ride".[1]

From without they crave a bridle and a curb. The doctrine of non-resistance is no *accident* of the Cavalier character, though it seems at first sight singular in an eager, tumultuous disposition. So inconsistent is human nature, that it proceeds from the very extremity of that tumult. They know that they cannot allow themselves to question the authority which is upon them; they feel its necessity too acutely, their intellect is untrained in subtle disquisitions, their conscience fluctuating, their passions rising. They are sure that if they once depart from that authority, their whole soul will be in anarchy. As a riotous state tends to fall under a martial tyranny, a passionate mind tends to subject itself to an extrinsic law—to enslave itself to an outward discipline. "That is what the king says, boy, and that was ever enough for Sir Henry Lee." An hereditary monarch is, indeed, the very embodiment of this principle. The authority is so defined, so clearly vested, so evidently intelligible; it descends so distinctly from the past, it is imposed so conspicuously from without. Anything free refers to the people; anything elected seems self-chosen. "The divinity that doth hedge a king"[2] consists in his evidently representing an unmade, unchosen, hereditary duty.

The greatness of this character is not in Macaulay's way, and its faults are. Its license affronts him; its riot alienates

[1] "Childe Harold," canto iii., verse 44. [2] "Hamlet," iv. 5.

him. He is for ever contrasting the dissoluteness of Prince Rupert's Horse with the restraint of Cromwell's pikemen. A deep enjoying nature finds no sympathy. The brilliant style passes forward: we dwell on its brilliancy, but it is cold. Macaulay has no tears for that warm life, no tenderness for that extinct joy. The ignorance of the Cavalier, too, moves his wrath: "They were ignorant of what every schoolgirl knows". Their loyalty to their sovereign is the devotion of the Egyptians to the god Apis, who selected a "calf to adore". Their non-resistance offends the philosopher: their license is commented on with the tone of a precisian. Their indecorum does not suit the dignity of the narrator. Their rich free nature is unappreciated; the tingling intensity of their joy is unnoticed. In a word, there is something of the schoolboy about the Cavalier—there is somewhat of a schoolmaster about the historian.

It might be thought, at first sight, that the insensibility and coldness which are unfavourable to the appreciation of the Cavalier would be particularly favourable to that of the Puritan. Some may say that a natural aloofness from things earthly would dispose a man to the doctrines of a sect which enjoins above all other commandments abstinence and aloofness *from* those things. In Macaulay's case it certainly has had no such consequence. He was bred up in the circle which more than any other has resembled that of the greatest and best Puritans—in the circle which has presented the evangelical doctrine in its most influential and celebrated, and not its least genial form. Yet he has revolted against it. "The bray of Exeter Hall" is a phrase which has become celebrated: it is an odd one for his father's son. The whole course of his personal fortunes, the entire scope of his historical narrative, show an utter want of sympathy with the Puritan disposition. It would be idle to quote passages; it will be enough to recollect the contrast between

the estimate—say, of Cromwell—by Carlyle and that by Macaulay, to be aware of the enormous discrepancy. The one's manner evinces an instinctive sympathy, the other's an instinctive aversion.

We believe that this is but a consequence of the same impassibility of nature which we have said so much of. M. de Montalembert, in a striking *éloge* on a French historian [1] —a man of the Southey type—after speaking of his life in Paris during youth (a youth cast in the early and exciting years of the first Revolution, and of the prelude to it), and graphically portraying a man subject to scepticism, but not given to vice; staid in habits, but unbelieving in opinion; without faith and without irregularity,—winds up the whole by the sentence, that "*he was hardened at once against good and evil*". In his view, the insensibility which was a guard against exterior temptation was also a hindrance to inward belief: and there is a philosophy in this. The nature of man is not two things, but one thing. We have not one set of affections, hopes, sensibilities, to be affected by the present world, and another and a different to be affected by the invisible world: we are moved by grandeur, or we are not; we are stirred by sublimity, or we are not; we hunger after righteousness, or we do not; we hate vice, or we do not; we are passionate, or not passionate; loving, or not loving; cold, or not cold; our heart is dull, or it is wakeful; our soul is alive, or it is dead. Deep under the surface of the intellect lies the *stratum* of the passions, of the intense, peculiar, simple impulses which constitute the heart of man; there is the eager essence, the primitive desiring being. What stirs this latent being we know. In general it is stirred by every-

[1] Droz (author of the *History of Louis XIV.*, etc.), whom Montalembert succeeded in the Académie Française, and whose *éloge* he pronounced, according to custom, on 5th December, 1852. (Forrest Morgan.)

thing. Sluggish natures are stirred little, wild natures are stirred much: but all are stirred somewhat. It is not important whether the object be in the visible or invisible world: whoso loves what he has seen, will love what he has not seen; whoso hates what he has seen, will hate what he has not seen. Creation is, as it were, but the garment of the Creator: whoever is blind to the beauty on its surface, will be insensible to the beauty beneath; whoso is dead to the sublimity before his senses, will be dull to that which he imagines; whoso is untouched by the visible man, will be unmoved by the invisible God. These are no new ideas; and the conspicuous evidence of history confirms them. Everywhere the deep religious organisation has been deeply sensitive to this world. If we compare what are called sacred and profane literatures, the depth of human affection is deeper in the sacred. A warmth as of life is on the Hebrew, a chill as of marble is on the Greek. In Jewish history the most tenderly religious character is the most sensitive to earth. Along every lyric of the Psalmist thrills a deep spirit of human enjoyment; he was alive as a child to the simple aspects of the world; the very errors of his mingled career are but those to which the open, enjoying character is most prone; its principle, so to speak, was a tremulous passion for that which he had seen, as well as that which he had not seen. There is no paradox, therefore, in saying that the same character which least appreciates the impulsive and ardent Cavalier is also the most likely not to appreciate the warm zeal of an overpowering devotion.

Some years ago it would have been necessary to show at length that the Puritans had such a devotion. The notion had been that they were fanatics, who simulated zeal, and hypocrites, who misquoted the Old Testament. A new era has arrived; one of the great discoveries which the competition of authors has introduced into historical researches

has attained a singular popularity. Times are changed. We are rather now, in general, in danger of holding too high an estimate of the puritanical character than a too low or contemptuous one. Among the disciples of Carlyle it is considered that having been a Puritan is the next best thing to having been in Germany. But though we cannot sympathise with everything that the expounders of the new theory allege, and though we should not select for praise the exact peculiarities most agreeable to the slightly grim "gospel of earnestness," we acknowledge the great service which they have rendered to English history. No one will now ever overlook, that in the greater, in the original Puritans —in Cromwell, for example—the whole basis of the character was a passionate, deep, rich, religious organisation.

This is not in Macaulay's way. It is not that he is sceptical; far from it. "Divines of all persuasions," he tells us, "are agreed that there is a religion"; and he acquiesces in their teaching. But he has no passionate self-questionings, no indomitable fears, no asking perplexities. He is probably pleased at the exemption. He has praised Bacon for a similar want of interest. "Nor did he ever meddle with those enigmas which have puzzled hundreds of generations, and will puzzle hundreds more. He said nothing about the grounds of moral obligation, or the freedom of the human will. He had no inclination to employ himself in labours resembling those of the damned in the Grecian Tartarus—to spin for ever on the same wheel round the same pivot. He lived in an age in which disputes on the most subtle points of divinity excited an intense interest throughout Europe; and nowhere more than in England. He was placed in the very thick of the conflict. He was in power at the time of the Synod of Dort, and must for months have been daily deafened with talk about election, reprobation, and final perseverance. Yet we do not

remember a line in his works from which it can be inferred that he was either a Calvinist or an Arminian. While the world was resounding with the noise of a disputatious philosophy and a disputatious theology, the Baconian school, like Allworthy seated between Square and Thwackum,[1] preserved a calm neutrality,—half-scornful, half-benevolent,—and, content with adding to the sum of practical good, left the war of words to those who liked it." This may be the writing of good sense, but it is not the expression of an anxious or passionate religious nature.

Such is the explanation of Macaulay's not prizing so highly as he should prize the essential excellences of the Puritan character. He is defective in the one point in which they were very great; he is eminent in the very point in which they were most defective. A spirit of easy cheerfulness pervades his writings, a pleasant geniality overflows his history: the rigid asceticism, the pain for pain's sake, of the Puritan is altogether alien to him. Retribution he would deny; sin is hardly a part of his creed. His religion is one of thanksgiving. His notion of philosophy—it would be a better notion of his own writing—is *illustrans commoda vitæ*.

The English Revolution is the very topic for a person of this character. It is eminently an unimpassioned movement. It requires no appreciation of the Cavalier or of the zealot; no sympathy with the romance of this world; no inclination to pass beyond, and absorb the mind's energies in another. It had neither the rough enthusiasm of barbarism nor the delicate grace of high civilisation: the men who conducted it had neither the deep spirit of Cromwell's Puritans nor the chivalric loyalty of the enjoying English gentleman. They were hard-headed, sensible men, who knew that politics were a kind of business, that the essence of business is

[1] In Fielding's *Tom Jones*.

compromise, of practicality concession. They drove no theory to excess; for they had no theory. Their passions did not hurry them away; for their temperament was still, their reason calculating and calm. Locke is the type of the best character of his era. There is nothing in him which a historian such as we have described could fail to comprehend, or could not sympathise with when he did comprehend. He was the very reverse of a Cavalier; he came of a Puritan stock; he retained through life a kind of chilled Puritanism; he had nothing of its excessive, overpowering, interior zeal, but he retained the formal decorum which it had given to the manners, the solid earnestness of its intellect, the heavy respectability of its character. In all the nations across which Puritanism has passed you may notice something of its indifference to this world's lighter enjoyments; no one of them has been quite able to retain its singular interest in what is beyond the veil of time and sense. The generation to which we owe our Revolution was in the first stage of the descent. Locke thought a zealot a dangerous person, and a poet little better than a rascal. It has been said, with perhaps an allusion to Macaulay, that our historians have held that "all the people who lived before 1688 were either knaves or fools". This is, of course, an exaggeration; but those who have considered what sort of a person a historian is likely to be, will not be surprised at his preference for the people of that era. They had the equable sense which he appreciates; they had not the deep animated passions to which his nature is insensible.

Yet, though Macaulay shares in the common temperament of historians, and in the sympathy with, and appreciation of, the characters most congenial to that temperament, he is singularly contrasted with them in one respect—he has a vivid fancy, they have a dull one. History is generally written on the principle that human life is a transaction;

that people come to it with defined intentions and a calm self-possessed air, as stockjobbers would buy "omnium," as timber-merchants buy "best-middling"; people are alike, and things are alike; everything is a little dull, every one a little slow; manners are not depicted, traits are not noticed; the narrative is confined to those great transactions which can be understood without any imaginative delineation of their accompaniments. There are two kinds of things—those which you need only to *understand*, and those which you need also to *imagine*. That a man bought nine hundredweight of hops is an intelligible idea—you do not want the hops delineated or the man described; that he went into society suggests an inquiry—you want to know what the society was like, and how far he was fitted to be there. The great business transactions of the political world are of the intelligible description. Macaulay has himself said:—

"A history, in which every particular incident may be true, may on the whole be false. The circumstances which have most influence on the happiness of mankind, the changes of manners and morals, the transition of communities from poverty to wealth, from knowledge to ignorance, from ferocity to humanity, these are, for the most part, noiseless revolutions. Their progress is rarely indicated by what historians are pleased to call important events. They are not achieved by armies, or enacted by senates. They are sanctioned by no treaties, and recorded in no archives They are carried on in every school, in every church, behind ten thousand counters, at ten thousand firesides. The upper current of society presents no certain criterion by which we can judge of the direction in which the undercurrent flows. We read of defeats and victories; but we know that nations may be miserable amidst victories, and prosperous amidst defeats. We read of the fall of wise ministers, and of the rise of profligate favourites; but we must remember how small a proportion the good or evil effected by a single statesman can bear to the good or evil of a great social system."[1]

But of this sluggishness of imagination he has certainly no

[1] Essay on "History". All the other quotations on the next page are from the same source.

trace himself. He is willing to be "behind ten thousand counters," to be a guest "at ten thousand firesides". He is willing to see "ordinary men as they appear in their ordinary business and in their ordinary pleasures". He has no objection to "mingle in the crowds of the Exchange and the coffee-house". He would "obtain admittance to the convivial table and the domestic hearth". So far as his dignity will permit, "he will bear with vulgar expressions". And a singular efficacy of fancy gives him the power to do so. Some portion of the essence of human nature is concealed from him; but all its accessories are at his command. He delineates any trait; he can paint, and justly paint, any manners he chooses.

"A perfect historian," he tells us, "is he in whose work the character and spirit of an age is exhibited in miniature. He relates no fact, he attributes no expression to his characters, which is not authenticated by sufficient testimony; but, by judicious selection, rejection, and arrangement, he gives to truth those attractions which have been usurped by fiction. In his narrative a due subordination is observed—some transactions are prominent, others retire; but the scale on which he represents them is increased or diminished, not according to the dignity of the persons concerned in them, but according to the degree in which they elucidate the condition of society and the nature of man. He shows us the court, the camp, and the senate; but he shows us also the nation. He considers no anecdote, no peculiarity of manner, no familiar saying, as too insignificant for his notice, which is not too insignificant to illustrate the operation of laws, of religion, and of education, and to mark the progress of the human mind. Men will not merely be described, but will be made intimately known to us. The changes of manners will be indicated, not merely by a few general phrases, or a few extracts from statistical documents, but by appropriate images presented in every line. If a man, such as we are supposing, should write the history of England, he would assuredly not omit the battles, the sieges, the negotiations, the seditions, the ministerial changes; but with these he would intersperse the details which are the charm of historical romances. At Lincoln Cathedral there is a beautiful painted window, which was made by an apprentice out of the pieces of glass which had been rejected by his master. It is so far

superior to every other in the church, that, according to the tradition, the vanquished artist killed himself from mortification. Sir Walter Scott, in the same manner, has used those fragments of truth which historians have scornfully thrown behind them in a manner which may well excite their envy. He has constructed out of their gleanings works which, even considered as histories, are scarcely less valuable than theirs. But a truly great historian would reclaim those materials which the novelist has appropriated. The history of the Government, and the history of the people, would be exhibited in that mode in which alone they can be exhibited justly, in inseparable conjunction and intermixture. We should not then have to look for the wars and votes of the Puritans in Clarendon, and for their phraseology in *Old Mortality ;* for one half of King James in Hume, and for the other half in the *Fortunes of Nigel.*" [1]

So far as the graphic description of exterior life goes, he has completely realised his idea.

This union of a flowing fancy with an insensible organisation is very rare. In general, a delicate fancy is joined with a poetic organisation. Exactly why, it would be difficult to explain. It is for metaphysicians in large volumes to explain the genesis of the human faculties ; but, as a fact, it seems to be clear that, for the most part, imaginative men are the most sensitive to the poetic side of human life and natural scenery. They are drawn by a strong instinct to what is sublime, grand, and beautiful. They do not care for the coarse business of life. They dislike to be cursed with its ordinary cares. Their nature is vivid ; it is interested by all which naturally interests ; it dwells on the great, the graceful, and the grand. On this account it naturally runs away from history. The very name of it is too oppressive. Are not all such works written in the *Index Expurgatorius* of the genial satirist as works which it was impossible to read ? [2] The coarse and cumbrous matter revolts the soul of the fine and fanciful voluptuary. Take it as you will, human

[1] Essay on "History".

[2] Lamb: *Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading.*

life is like the earth on which man dwells. There are exquisite beauties, grand imposing objects, scattered here and there; but the spaces between these are wide; the mass of common clay is huge; the dead level of vacant life, of commonplace geography, is immense. The poetic nature cannot bear the preponderance; it seeks relief in selected scenes, in special topics, in favourite beauties. History, which is the record of human existence, is a faithful representative of it, at least in this: the poetic mind cannot bear the weight of its narrations and the commonplaceness of its events.

This peculiarity of character gives to Macaulay's writing one of its most curious characteristics. He throws over matters which are in their nature dry and dull,—transactions —budgets—bills,—the charm of fancy which a poetical mind employs to enhance and set forth the charm of what is beautiful. An attractive style is generally devoted to what is in itself specially attractive; here it is devoted to subjects which are often unattractive, are sometimes even repelling, at the best are commonly neutral, not inviting attention, if they do not excite dislike. In these new volumes there is a currency reform, pages on Scotch Presbyterianism, a heap of Parliamentary debates. Who could be expected to make anything interesting of such topics? It is not cheerful to read in the morning papers the debates of yesterday, though they happened last night; we cannot like a Calvinistic divine when we see him in the pulpit; it is awful to read on the currency, even when it concerns the bank-notes which we use. How, then, can we care for a narrative when the divine is dead, the shillings extinct, the whole topic of the debate forgotten and passed away? Yet such is the power of style, so great is the charm of very skilful words, of narration which is always passing forward, of illustration which always hits the mark, that such subjects as these not only become interesting, but very interesting. The proof is

evident. No book is so sought after. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said "all members of Parliament had read it". What other books could ever be fancied to have been read by them? A county member—a real county member—hardly reads two volumes *per* existence. Years ago Macaulay said a History of England might become more in demand at the circulating libraries than the last novel. He has actually made his words true. It is no longer a phrase of rhetoric, it is a simple fact.

The explanation of this remarkable notoriety is, the contrast of the topic and the treatment. Those who read for the sake of entertainment are attracted by the one; those who read for the sake of instruction are attracted by the other. Macaulay has something that suits the readers of Mr. Hallam; he has something which will please the readers of Mr. Thackeray. The first wonder to find themselves reading such a style; the last are astonished at reading on such topics—at finding themselves studying by casualty. This marks the author. Only a buoyant fancy and an impassive temperament could produce a book so combining weight with levity.

Something similar may be remarked of the writings of a still greater man—of Edmund Burke. The contrast between the manner of his characteristic writings and their matter is very remarkable. He too threw over the detail of business and of politics those graces and attractions of manner which seem in some sort inconsistent with them; which are adapted for topics more intrinsically sublime and beautiful. It was for this reason that Hazlitt asserted that "no woman ever cared for Burke's writings". The matter, he said, was "hard and dry," and no superficial glitter of eloquence could make it agreeable to those who liked what is, in its very nature, fine and delicate. The charm of exquisite narration has, in a great degree, in Macaulay's case, supplied the

deficiency; but it may be *perhaps* remarked, that some trace of the same phenomenon has again occurred, from similar causes, and that his popularity, though great among both sexes, is in some sense more masculine than feminine. The absence of this charm of narration, to which accomplished women are, it would seem, peculiarly sensitive, is very characteristic of Burke. His mind was the reverse of historical. Although he had rather a coarse, incondite temperament, not finely susceptible to the best influences, to the most exquisite beauties of the world in which he lived, he yet lived in that world thoroughly and completely. He did not take an interest, as a poet does, in the sublime, because it is sublime, in the beautiful, because it is beautiful; but he had the passions of more ordinary men in a degree, and of an intensity, which ordinary men may be most thankful that they have not. In no one has the intense faculty of intellectual hatred—the hatred which the absolute dogmatist has for those in whom he incarnates and personifies the opposing dogma—been fiercer or stronger; in no one has the intense ambition to rule and govern,—in scarcely any one has the daily ambition of the daily politician been fiercer and stronger: he, if any man, cast himself upon his time. After one of his speeches, peruse one of Macaulay's: you seem transported to another sphere. The fierce living interest of the one contrasts with the cold rhetorical interest of the other; you are in a different part of the animal kingdom; you have left the viviparous intellect; you have left products warm and struggling with hasty life; you have reached the oviparous, and products smooth and polished, cold and stately.

In addition to this impassive nature, inclining him to write on past transactions—to this fancy, enabling him to adorn and describe them—Macaulay has a marvellous memory to recall them; and what we may call the Scotch intellect, enabling him to conceive them. The memory

is his most obvious power. An enormous reading seems always present to him. No effort seems wanted—no mental excogitation. According to his own description of a like faculty, "it would have been strange indeed if you had asked for anything that was not to be found in that immense storehouse. The article you required was not only there, it was ready. It was in its own compartment. In a moment it was brought down, unpacked, and explained." [1] He has a literary illustration for everything; and his fancy enables him to make a skilful use of his wealth. He always selects the exact likeness of the idea which he wishes to explain. And though it be less obvious, yet his writing would have been deficient in one of its most essential characteristics if it had not been for what we have called his Scotch intellect, which is a curious matter to explain. It may be thought that Adam Smith had little in common with Sir Walter Scott. Sir Walter was always making fun of him; telling odd tales of his abstraction and singularity; not obscurely hinting, that a man who could hardly put on his own coat, and certainly could not buy his own dinner, was scarcely fit to decide on the proper course of industry and the mercantile dealings of nations. Yet, when Sir Walter's own works come to be closely examined, they will be found to contain a good deal of political economy of a certain sort,—and not a very bad sort. Any one who will study his description of the Highland clans in *Waverley;* his observations on the industrial side (if so it is to be called) of the Border-life; his plans for dealing with the poor of his own time,—will be struck not only with a plain sagacity, which we could equal in England, but with the digested accuracy and theoretical completeness which they show. You might cut paragraphs, even from his lighter writings, which would be thought acute in the *Wealth of Nations.* There appears to be in

[1] Essay on "Sir James Mackintosh".

the genius of the Scotch people—fostered, no doubt, by the abstract metaphysical education of their Universities, but, also, by way of natural taste, supporting that education, and rendering it possible and popular—a power of reducing human actions to formulæ or principles. An instance is now in a high place. People who are not lawyers,—rural people, who have sense of their own, but have no access to the general repute and opinion which expresses the collective sense of the great world,—never can be brought to believe that Lord Campbell is a great man. They read his speeches in the House of Lords—his occasional flights of eloquence on the Bench—his attempts at pathos—his stupendous *gaucheries*—and they cannot be persuaded that a person guilty of such things can have really first-rate talent. If you ask them how he came to be Chief Justice of England, they mutter something angry, and say, "Well, Scotchmen *do* get on somehow". This is really the true explanation. In spite of a hundred defects, Lord Campbell has the Scotch faculties in perfection. He reduces legal matters to a sound broad principle better than any man who is now a judge. He has a steady, comprehensive, abstract, distinct consistency, which elaborates a formula and adheres to a formula; and it is this which has raised him from a plain—a very plain—Scotch lawyer to be Lord Chief Justice of England. Macaulay has this too. Among his more brilliant qualities, it has escaped the attention of critics; the more so, because his powers of exposition and expression make it impossible to conceive for a moment that the amusing matter we are reading is really Scotch economy.

"During the interval," he tells us, "between the Restoration and the Revolution, the riches of the nation had been rapidly increasing. Thousands of busy men found every Christmas that, after the expenses of the year's housekeeping had been defrayed out of the year's income, a surplus remained; and how that surplus was to be employed was a question of some difficulty. In our time, to invest such a surplus, at

something more than three per cent., on the best security that has ever been known in the world, is the work of a few minutes. But in the seventeenth century, a lawyer, a physician, a retired merchant, who had saved some thousands, and who wished to place them safely and profitably, was often greatly embarrassed. Three generations earlier, a man who had accumulated wealth in a profession generally purchased real property, or lent his savings on mortgage. But the number of acres in the kingdom had remained the same; and the value of those acres, though it had greatly increased, had by no means increased so fast as the quantity of capital which was seeking for employment. Many, too, wished to put their money where they could find it at an hour's notice, and looked about for some species of property which could be more readily transferred than a house or a field. A capitalist might lend on bottomry or on personal security; but, if he did so, he ran a great risk of losing interest and principal. There were a few joint-stock companies, among which the East India Company held the foremost place; but the demand for the stock of such companies was far greater than the supply. Indeed, the cry for a new East India Company was chiefly raised by persons who had found difficulty in placing their savings at interest on good security. So great was that difficulty, that the practice of hoarding was common. We are told that the father of Pope, the poet, who retired from business in the City about the time of the Revolution, carried to a retreat in the country a strong box containing nearly twenty thousand pounds, and took out from time to time what was required for household expenses; and it is highly probable that this was not a solitary case. At present, the quantity of coin which is hoarded by private persons is so small, that it would, if brought forth, make no perceptible addition to the circulation. But, in the earlier part of the reign of William the Third, all the greatest writers on currency were of opinion that a very considerable mass of gold and silver was hidden in secret drawers and behind wainscots.

"The natural effect of this state of things was, that a crowd of projectors, ingenious and absurd, honest and knavish, employed themselves in devising new schemes for the employment of redundant capital. It was about the year 1688 that the word stockjobber was first heard in London. In the short space of four years a crowd of companies, every one of which confidently held out to subscribers the hope of immense gains, sprang into existence: the Insurance Company, the Paper Company, the Lutestring Company, the Pearl-Fishery Company, the Glass-Bottle Company, the Alum Company, the Blythe Coal Company, the Swordblade Company. There was a Tapestry Company, which would

soon furnish pretty hangings for all the parlours of the middle class and for all the bedchambers of the higher. There was a Copper Company, which proposed to explore the mines of England, and held out a hope that they would prove not less valuable than those of Potosi. There was a Diving Company, which undertook to bring up precious effects from shipwrecked vessels, and which announced that it had laid in a stock of wonderful machines, resembling complete suits of armour. In front of the helmet was a huge glass eye, like that of a Cyclop; and out of the crest went a pipe, through which the air was to be admitted. The whole process was exhibited on the Thames. Fine gentlemen and fine ladies were invited to the show, were hospitably regaled, and were delighted by seeing the divers in their panoply descend into the river, and return laden with old iron and ship's tackle. There was a Greenland Fishing Company, which could not fail to drive the Dutch whalers and herring-busses out of the Northern Ocean. There was a Tanning Company, which promised to furnish leather superior to the best that was brought from Turkey or Russia. There was a society which undertook the office of giving gentlemen a liberal education on low terms, and which assumed the sounding name of the Royal Academies Company. In a pompous advertisement it was announced that the directors of the Royal Academies Company had engaged the best masters in every branch of knowledge, and were about to issue twenty thousand tickets at twenty shillings each. There was to be a lottery: two thousand prizes were to be drawn; and the fortunate holders of the prizes were to be taught, at the charge of the Company, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Spanish, conic sections, trigonometry, heraldry, japanning, fortification, book-keeping, and the art of playing the theorbo. Some of these companies took large mansions, and printed their advertisements in gilded letters. Others, less ostentatious, were content with ink, and met at coffee-houses in the neighbourhood of the Royal Exchange. Jonathan's and Garraway's were in a constant ferment with brokers, buyers, sellers, meetings of directors, meetings of proprietors. Time-bargains soon came into fashion. Extensive combinations were formed, and monstrous fables were circulated, for the purpose of raising or depressing the price of shares. Our country witnessed for the first time those phenomena with which a long experience has made us familiar. A mania, of which the symptoms were essentially the same with those of the mania of 1720, of the mania of 1825, of the mania of 1845, seized the public mind. An impatience to be rich, a contempt for those slow but sure gains which are the proper reward of industry, patience, and thrift, spread through society. The spirit of the

cogging dicers at Whitefriars took possession of the grave senators of the City, wardens of trades, deputies, aldermen. It was much easier and much more lucrative to put forth a lying prospectus announcing a new stock, to persuade ignorant people that the dividends could not fall short of twenty per cent., and to part with five thousand pounds of this imaginary wealth for ten thousand solid guineas, than to load a ship with a well-chosen cargo for Virginia or the Levant. Every day some new bubble was puffed into existence, rose buoyant, shone bright, burst, and was forgotten." [1]

You will not find the cause of panics so accurately explained in the dryest of political economists — in the Scotch M'Culloch.

These peculiarities of character and mind may be very conspicuously traced through the *History of England*, and in the *Essays*. Their first and most striking quality is the *intellectual entertainment* which they afford. This, as practical readers know, is a kind of sensation which is not very common, and which is very productive of great and healthy enjoyment. It is quite distinct from the amusement which is derived from common light works. The latter is very great; but it is passive. The mind of the reader is not awakened to any independent action: you see the farce, but you see it without effort; not simply without painful effort, but without any perceptible mental activity whatever. Again, entertainment of intellect is contrasted with the high enjoyment of consciously following pure and difficult reasoning; such a sensation is a sort of sublimated pain. The highest and most intense action of the intellectual powers is like the most intense action of the bodily on a high mountain. We climb and climb: we have a thrill of pleasure, but we have also a sense of effort and anguish. Nor is the sensation to be confounded with that which we experience from the best and purest works of art. The pleasure of high

[1] *History of England*, chap. xix.

tragedy is also painful: the whole soul is stretched; the spirit pants; the passions scarcely breathe: it is a rapt and eager moment, too intense for continuance—so overpowering, that we scarcely know whether it be joy or pain. The sensation of intellectual entertainment is altogether distinguished from these by not being accompanied by any pain, and yet being consequent on, or being contemporaneous with, a high and constant exercise of mind. While we read works which so delight us, we are conscious that we are delighted, and are conscious that we are not idle. The opposite pleasures of indolence and exertion seem for a moment combined. A sort of elasticity pervades us; thoughts come easily and quickly; we seem capable of many ideas; we follow cleverness till we fancy that we are clever. This feeling is only given by writers who stimulate the mind just to the degree which is pleasant, and who do not stimulate it more; who exact a moderate exercise of mind, and who seduce us to it insensibly. This can only be, of course, by a charm of style; by the inexplicable *je ne sais quoi* which attracts our attention; by constantly raising and constantly satisfying our curiosity. And there seems to be a further condition. A writer who wishes to produce this constant effect must not appeal to any single, separate faculty of mind, but to the whole mind at once. The fancy tires, if you appeal only to the fancy; the understanding is aware of its dulness, if you appeal only to the understanding; the curiosity is soon satiated, unless you pique it with variety. This is the very opportunity for Macaulay. He has fancy, sense, abundance; he appeals to both fancy and understanding. There is no sense of effort. His books read like an elastic dream. There is a continual sense of instruction; for who had an idea of the transactions before? The emotions, too, which he appeals to are the easy admiration, the cool disapprobation, the gentle worldly curiosity, which

quietly excite us, never fatigue us,—which we could bear for ever. To read Macaulay for a day, would be to pass a day of easy thought, of pleasant placid emotion.

Nor is this a small matter. In a state of high civilisation it is no simple matter to give multitudes a large and healthy enjoyment. The old bodily enjoyments are dying out; there is no room for them any more; the complex apparatus of civilisation cumbers the ground. We are thrown back upon the mind, and the mind is a barren thing. It can spin little from itself: few that describe what they see are in the way to discern much. Exaggerated emotions, violent incidents, monstrous characters, crowd our canvas; they are the resource of a weakness which would obtain the fame of strength. Reading is about to become a series of collisions against aggravated breakers, of beatings with imaginary surf. In such times a book of sensible attraction is a public benefit; it diffuses a sensation of vigour through the multitude. Perhaps there is a danger that the extreme popularity of the manner may make many persons fancy they understand the matter more perfectly than they do: some readers may become conceited; several boys believe that they too are Macaulays. Yet, duly allowing for this defect, it is a great good that so many people should learn so much on such topics so agreeably; that they should feel that they *can* understand them; that their minds should be stimulated by a consciousness of health and power.

The same peculiarities influence the style of the narrative. The art of narration is the art of writing in hooks-and-eyes. The principle consists in making the appropriate thought follow the appropriate thought, the proper fact the proper fact; in first preparing the mind for what is to come, and then letting it come. This can only be achieved by keeping continually and insensibly before the mind of the reader some

one object, character, or image, whose variations are the events of the story, whose unity is the unity of it. Scott, for example, keeps before you the mind of some one person,—that of Morton in *Old Mortality*, of Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*, of Lovel in *The Antiquary*,—whose fortunes and mental changes are the central incidents, whose personality is the string of unity. It is the defect of the great Scotch novels that their central figure is frequently not their most interesting topic,—that their interest is often rather in the accessories than in the essential principle, rather in that which surrounds the centre of narration than in the centre itself. Scott tries to meet this objection by varying the mind which he selects for his unit; in one of his chapters it is one character, in the next a different; he shifts the scene from the hero to the heroine, from the "Protector of the settlement" of the story to the evil being who mars it perpetually: but when narrowly examined, the principle of his narration will be found nearly always the same,—the changes in the position—external or mental—of some one human being. The most curiously opposite sort of narration is that of Hume. He seems to carry a *view*, as the moderns call it, through everything. He forms to himself a metaphysical—that perhaps is a harsh word—an intellectual conception of the time and character before him; and the gradual working out or development of that view is the principle of his narration. He tells the story of the conception. You rise from his pages without much remembrance of or regard for the mere people, but with a clear notion of an elaborated view, skilfully abstracted and perpetually impressed upon you. A critic of detail should scarcely require a better task than to show how insensibly and artfully the subtle historian infuses his doctrine among the facts, indicates somehow—you can scarcely say how—their relation to it; strings them, as it were, upon it, concealing it in seeming beneath them, while

in fact it altogether determines their form, their grouping, and their consistency. The style of Macaulay is very different from either of these. It is a diorama of political pictures. You seem to begin with a brilliant picture,—its colours are distinct, its lines are firm; on a sudden it changes, at first gradually, you can scarcely tell how or in what, but truly and unmistakably,—a slightly different picture is before you; then the second vision seems to change,—it too is another and yet the same; then the third shines forth and fades; and so without end. The unity of this delineation is the identity—the apparent identity—of the picture; in no two moments does it seem quite different, in no two is it identically the same. It grows and alters as our bodies would appear to alter and grow, if you could fancy any one watching them, and being conscious of their daily little changes. The events are picturesque variations; the unity is a unity of political painting, of represented external form. It is evident how suitable this is to a writer whose understanding is solid, whose sense is political, whose fancy is fine and delineative.

To this merit of Macaulay is to be added another. No one describes so well what we may call the *spectacle* of a character. The art of delineating character by protracted description is one which grows in spite of the critics. In vain is it alleged that the character should be shown dramatically; that it should be illustrated by events; that it should be exhibited in its actions. The truth is, that these homilies are excellent, but incomplete; true, but out of season. There is a utility in verbal portrait, as Lord Stanhope says there is in painted. Goethe used to observe, that in society —in a *tête-à-tête*, rather—you often thought of your companion as if he was his portrait: you were silent; you did not care what he said; but you considered him as a picture, as a whole, especially as regards yourself and your relations

towards him.[1] You require something of the same kind in literature; *some* description of a man is clearly necessary as an introduction to the story of his life and actions. But more than this is wanted; you require to have the object placed before you as a whole, to have the characteristic traits mentioned, the delicate qualities drawn out, the firm features gently depicted. As the practice which Goethe hints at is, of all others, the most favourable to a just and calm judgment of character, so the literary substitute is essential as a steadying element, as a summary, to bring together and give a unity to our views. We must see the man's face. Without it, we seem to have heard a great deal about the person, but not to have known him; to be aware that he had done a good deal, but to have no settled, ineradicable notion what manner of man he was. This is the reason why critics like Macaulay, who sneer at the practice when estimating the work of others, yet make use of it at great length, and, in his case, with great skill, when they come to be historians themselves. The kind of characters whom Macaulay can describe is limited—at least we think so—by the bounds which we indicated just now. There are some men whom he is too impassive to comprehend; but he can always tell us of such as he does comprehend, what they looked like, and what they were.

A great deal of this vividness Macaulay of course owes to his style. Of its effectiveness there can be no doubt; its agreeableness no one who has just been reading it is likely to deny. Yet it has a defect. It is not, as Bishop Butler would have expressed it, such a style as "is suitable to such a being as man, in such a world as the present one". It is too omniscient. Everything is too plain. All is clear; nothing is doubtful. Instead of probability being, as the

[1] *Elective Affinities*, part ii., chap. ii.

great thinker expressed it, "the very guide of life,"[1] it has become a rare exception—an uncommon phenomenon. You rarely come across anything which is not decided; and when you do come across it, you seem to wonder that the positiveness, which has accomplished so much, should have been unwilling to decide everything. This is hardly the style for history. The data of historical narratives, especially of modern histories, are a heap of confusion. No one can tell where they lie, or where they do not lie; what is in them, or what is not in them. Literature is called the "fragment of fragments"; little has been written, and but little of that little has been preserved. So history is a vestige of vestiges; few facts leave any trace of themselves, any witness of their occurrence; of fewer still is that witness preserved; a slight track is all anything leaves, and the confusion of life, the tumult of change, sweeps even that away in a moment. It is not possible that these data can be very fertile in certainties. Few people would make anything of them: a memoir here, a MS. there—two letters in a magazine —an assertion by a person whose veracity is denied,—these are the sort of evidence out of which a flowing narrative is to be educed; and of course it ought not to be too flowing. "If you please, sir, tell me what you do *not* know," was the inquiry of a humble pupil addressed to a great man of science. It would have been a relief to the readers of Macaulay if he had shown a little the outside of uncertainties, which there must be—the gradations of doubt, which there ought to be—the singular accumulation of difficulties, which must beset the extraction of a very easy narrative from very confused materials.

This defect in style is, indeed, indicative of a defect in understanding. Macaulay's mind is eminently gifted, but there is a want of graduation in it. He has a fine eye for

[1] Introduction to *Butler's Analogy*.

probabilities, a clear perception of evidence, a shrewd guess at missing links of fact; but each probability seems to him a certainty, each piece of evidence conclusive, each analogy exact. The heavy Scotch intellect is a little prone to this: one figures it as a heap of formulæ, and if fact *b* is reducible to formula B, that is all which it regards; the mathematical mill grinds with equal energy at flour perfect and imperfect —at matter which is quite certain and at matter which is only a little probable. But the great cause of this error is, an abstinence from practical action. Life is a school of probability. In the writings of every man of patient practicality, in the midst of whatever other defects, you will find a careful appreciation of the degrees of likelihood; a steady balancing of them one against another; a disinclination to make things too clear, to overlook the debit side of the account in mere contemplation of the enormousness of the credit. The reason is obvious: action is a business of risk; the real question is the magnitude of that risk. Failure is ever impending; success is ever uncertain; there is always, in the very best of affairs, a slight probability of the former, a contingent possibility of the non-occurrence of the latter. For practical men, the problem ever is to test the amount of these inevitable probabilities; to make sure that no one increases too far; that by a well-varied choice the number of risks may in itself be a protection—be an insurance to you, as it were, against the capricious result of any one. A man like Macaulay, who stands aloof from life, is not so instructed; he sits secure: nothing happens in his study: he does not care to test probabilities; he loses the detective sensation.

Macaulay's so-called inaccuracy is likewise a phase of this defect. Considering the enormous advantages which a picturesque style gives to ill-disposed critics; the number of points of investigation which it suggests; the number of

assertions it makes, sentence by sentence; the number of ill-disposed critics that there are in the world; remembering Macaulay's position—set on a hill to be spied at by them—he can scarcely be thought an inaccurate historian. Considering all things, they have found few certain blunders, hardly any direct mistakes. Every sentence of his style requires minute knowledge; the vivid picture has a hundred details; each of those details must have an evidence, an authority, a proof. A historian like Hume passes easily over a period; his chart is large; if he gets the conspicuous headlands, the large harbours duly marked, he does not care. Macaulay puts in the depth of each wave, every remarkable rock, every tree on the shore. Nothing gives a critic so great an advantage. It is difficult to do this for a volume; simple for a page. It is easy to select a particular event, and learn all which any one can know about it; examine Macaulay's descriptions, say he is wrong, that X is not buried where he asserts, that a little boy was one year older than he states. But how would the critic manage, if he had to work out all this for a million facts, for a whole period? Few men, we suspect, would be able to make so few errors of simple and provable fact. On the other hand, few men would arouse a sleepy critic by such startling assertion. If Macaulay finds a new theory, he states it as a fact. Very likely it really is the most probable theory; at any rate, we know of no case in which his theory is not one among the most plausible. If it had only been so stated, it would have been well received. His view of Marlborough's character, for instance, is a specious one; it has a good deal of evidence, a large amount of real probability, but it has scarcely more. Marlborough *may* have been as bad as is said, but we can hardly be *sure* of it at this time.

Macaulay's "party-spirit" is another consequence of his positiveness. When he inclines to a side, he inclines to it

too much. His opinions are a shade too strong; his predilections some degrees at least too warm. William is too perfect, James too imperfect. The Whigs are a trifle like angels; the Tories like, let us say, "our inferiors". Yet this is evidently an honest party-spirit. It does not lurk in the corners of sentences, it is not insinuated without being alleged; it does not, like the unfairness of Hume, secrete itself so subtly in the turns of the words, that when you look to prove it, it is gone. On the contrary, it rushes into broad day. William is loaded with panegyric; James is always spoken evil of. Hume's is the artful pleading of a hired advocate; Macaulay's the bold eulogy of a sincere friend. As far as effect goes, this is an error. The very earnestness of the affection leads to a reaction; we are tired of having William called the "just"; we cannot believe so many pages; "all that" can scarcely be correct. As we said, if the historian's preference for persons and parties had been duly tempered and mitigated, if the probably good were only said to be probably good, if the rather bad were only alleged to be rather bad, the reader would have been convinced, and the historian would have escaped the savage censure of envious critics.

The one thing which detracts from the pleasure of reading these volumes, is the doubt whether they should have been written. Should not these great powers be reserved for great periods? Is this abounding, picturesque style suited for continuous history? Are small men to be so largely described? Should not admirable delineation be kept for admirable people? We think so. You do not want Raphael to paint sign-posts, or Palladio to build dirt-pies. Much of history is necessarily of little value,—the superficies of circumstance, the scum of events. It is very well to have it described, indeed you must have it described; the chain must be kept complete; the narrative of a country's fortunes

will not allow of breaks or gaps. Yet all things need not be done equally well. The life of a great painter is short. Even the industry of Macaulay will not complete this history. It is a pity to spend such powers on such events. It would have been better to have some new volumes of essays solely on great men and great things. The diffuseness of the style would have been then in place; we could have borne to hear the smallest *minutiæ* of magnificent epochs. If an inferior hand had executed the connecting links, our notions would have acquired an insensible perspective; the works of the great artist, the best themes, would have stood out from the canvas. They are now confused by the equal brilliancy of the adjacent inferiorities.

Much more might be said on this narrative. As it will be read for very many years, it will employ the critics for very many years. It would be unkind to make all the best observations. Something, as Mr. Disraeli said in a budget-speech, something should be left for "future statements of this nature". There will be an opportunity. Whatever those who come after may say against this book, it will be, and remain, the "Pictorial History of England".

BÉRANGER.[1]

(1857.)

The invention of books has at least one great advantage. It has half-abolished one of the worst consequences of the diversity of languages. Literature enables nations to understand one another. Oral intercourse hardly does this. In English, a distinguished foreigner says not what he thinks, but what he can. There is a certain intimate essence of national meaning which is as untranslatable as good poetry. Dry thoughts are cosmopolitan; but the delicate associations of language which express character, the traits of speech which mark the man, differ in every tongue, so that there are not even cumbrous circumlocutions that are equivalent in another. National character is a deep thing—a shy thing; you cannot exhibit much of it to people who have a difficulty in understanding your language; you are in strange society, and you feel you will not be understood. "Let an English gentleman," writes Mr. Thackeray, "who has dwelt two, four, or ten years in Paris, say at the end of any given period how much he knows of French society, how many French houses he has entered, and how many French friends he has made. Intimacy there is none; we see but the outsides of the people. Year by year we live in France, and

[1] *Œuvres complètes de* C.-J. de Béranger. *Nouvelle édition, revue par l'Auteur, contenant les Dix Chansons nouvelles, le facsimile d'une Lettre de* Béranger; *illustrée de cinquante-deux gravures sur acier, d'après* Charlet, D'Aubigny, Johannot Grenier, De Lemud, Pauquet, Penguilly, Raffet, Sandoz, *exécutées par les artistes les plus distingués, et d'un beau portrait d'après nature par* Sandoz. 2 vols., 8vo, 1855.

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grow grey and see no more. We play *écarté* with Monsieur de Trêfle every night; but what do we know of the heart of the man—of the inward ways, thoughts, and customs of Trêfle? We have danced with Countess Flicflac, Tuesdays and Thursdays, ever since the peace; and how far are we advanced in her acquaintance since we first twirled her round a room? We know her velvet gown and her diamonds; we know her smiles and her simpers and her rouge; but the real, rougeless, *intime* Flicflac we know not."[1] Even if our words did not stutter, as they do stutter on our tongue, she would not tell us what she is. Literature has half mended this. Books are exportable; the essence of national character lies flat on a printed page. Men of genius, with the impulses of solitude, produce works of art, whose words can be read and re-read and partially taken in by foreigners to whom they could never be uttered, the very thought of whose unsympathising faces would freeze them on the surface of the mind. Alexander Smith has accused poetical reviewers of beginning as far as possible from their subject. It may seem to some, though it is not so really, that we are exemplifying this saying in commencing as we have commenced an article on Béranger.

There are two kinds of poetry—which one may call poems of this world, and poems not of this world. We see a certain society on the earth held together by certain relations, performing certain acts, exhibiting certain phenomena, calling forth certain emotions. The millions of human beings who compose it have their various thoughts, feelings, and desires. They hate, act, and live. The social bond presses them closely together; and from their proximity new sentiments

1 We have been obliged to abridge the above extract, and in so doing have left out the humour of it. (W. Bagehot.) [From the *Paris Sketch Book;* condensed from the section on some French fashionable novels.] (Forrest Morgan.)

arise which are half superficial and do not touch the inmost soul, but which nevertheless are unspeakably important in the actual constitution of human nature, and work out their effects for good and for evil on the characters of those who are subjected to their influence. These sentiments of the world, as one may speak, differ from the more primitive impulses and emotions of our inner nature as the superficial phenomena of the material universe from what we fancy is its real essence. Passing hues, transient changes have their course before our eyes; a multiplex diorama is for ever displayed; underneath it all we fancy—such is the inevitable constitution of our thinking faculty—a primitive, immovable essence, which is modified into all the ever-changing phenomena we see, which is the grey granite whereon they lie, the primary substance whose *débris* they all are. Just so from the original and primitive emotions of man, society—the evolving capacity of combined action—brings out desires which seem new, in a sense are new, which have no existence out of the society itself, are coloured by its customs at the moment, change with the fashions of the age. Such a principle is what we may call social gaiety: the love of combined amusement which all men feel and variously express, and which is to the higher faculties of the soul what a gay running stream is to the everlasting mountain—a light, altering element which beautifies while it modifies. Poetry does not shrink from expressing such feelings; on the contrary, their renovating cheerfulness blends appropriately with her inspiriting delight. Each age and each form of the stimulating imagination has a fashion of its own. Sir Walter sings in his modernised chivalry:—

> "Waken, lords and ladies gay,
> On the mountain dawns the day;
> All the jolly chase is here,
> With hawk and horse and hunting-spear.

Hounds are in their couples yelling,
Hawks are whistling, horns are knelling.
Merrily, merrily, mingle they:
Waken, lords and ladies gay.

"Louder, louder chant the lay,
Waken, lords and ladies gay;
Tell them youth and mirth and glee
Run a course as well as we.
Time, stern huntsman, who can balk?
Stanch as hound and fleet as hawk;
Think of this, and rise with day,
Gentle lords and ladies gay."[1]

The poet of the people, "*vilain et très vilain*," sings with the pauper Bohemian:—

"Voir, c'est avoir. Allons courir!
Vie errante
Est chose enivrante.
Voir, c'est avoir. Allons courir!
Car tout voir, c'est tout conquérir.

"Nous n'avons donc, exempts d'orgueil,
De lois vaines,
De lourdes chaines;
Nous n'avons donc, exempts d'orgueil,
Ni berceau, ni toit, ni cercueil.

"Mais croyez-en notre gaîté,
Noble ou prêtre,
Valet ou maître;
Mais, croyez-en notre gaîté,
Le bonheur, c'est la liberté.

"Oui, croyez-en notre gaîté,
Noble ou prêtre,
Valet ou maître;
Oui, croyez-en notre gaîté,
Le bonheur, c'est la liberté."[2]

[1] A separate lyric first published in the *Edinburgh Annual Register* for 1808, and republished in the collected edition of Scott's *Poetical Works* in 1830, under the title of "Hunting Song," vol. viii. p. 370.

[2] *Les Bohémiens.*

The forms of those poems of social amusement are, in truth, as various as the social amusement itself. The variety of the world, singularly various as it everywhere is, is nowhere so various as in that. Men have more ways of amusing themselves than of doing anything else they do. But the essence—the characteristic—of these poems everywhere is, that they express more or less well the lighter desires of human nature;—those that have least of unspeakable depth, partake most of what is perishable and earthly, and least of the immortal soul. The objects of these desires are social accidents; excellent, perhaps, essential, possibly—so is human nature made—in one form and variety or another, to the well-being of the soul, yet in themselves, transitory, fleeting, and in other moods contemptible. The old saying was, that to endure solitude a man must either be a beast or a god.[1] It is in the lighter play of social action, in that which is neither animal nor divine, which in its halfway character is so natural to man, that these poems of society, which we have called poems of amusement, have their place.

This species does not, however, exhaust the whole class. Society gives rise to another sort of poems, differing from this one as contemplation differs from desire. Society may be thought of as an object. The varied scene of men,—their hopes, fears, anxieties, maxims, actions,—presents a sight more interesting to man than any other which has ever existed, or which can exist; and it may be viewed in all moods of mind, and with the change of inward emotion as the external object seems to change: not that it really does so, but that some sentiments are more favourable to clear-sightedness than others are; and some bring before us one aspect of the subject, and fix our attention upon it, others a

[1] Bacon: Essay on "Friendship," quoting from Aristotle's *Politica*. (Forrest Morgan.)

different one, and bind our minds to that likewise. Among the most remarkable of these varied views is the world's view of itself. The world, such as it is, has made up its mind what it is. Childishly deceivable by charlatans on every other subject,—imposed on by pedantry, by new and unfounded science, by ancient and unfounded reputation, a prey to pomposity, overrun with recondite fools, ignorant of all else,—society knows itself. The world knows a man of the world. A certain tradition pervades it; a *disciplina* of the market-place teaches what the collective society of men has ever been, and what, so long as the nature of man is the same, it cannot and will not cease to be. Literature, the written expression of human nature in every variety, takes up this variety likewise. Ancient literature exhibits it from obvious causes in a more simple manner than modern literature can. Those who are brought up in times like the present necessarily hear a different set of opinions, fall in with other words, are under the shadow of a higher creed. In consequence, they cannot have the simple *naïveté* of the old world; they cannot speak with easy equanimity of the fugitiveness of life, the necessity of death, of goodness as a mean, of sin as an extreme. The theory of the universe has ceased to be an open question. Still the spirit of Horace is alive, and as potent as that of any man. His tone is that of prime ministers; his easy philosophy is that of courts and parliaments; you may hear his words where no other foreign words are ever heard. He is but the extreme and perfect type of a whole class of writers, some of whom exist in every literary age, and who give an expression to what we may call the poetry of equanimity, that is, the world's view of itself; its self-satisfaction, its conviction that you must bear what comes, not hope for much, think *some* evil, never be excited, admire little, and then you will be at peace. This creed does not sound attractive in description. Nothing, it has been

said, is so easy as to be "religious on paper": on the other hand, it is rather difficult to be worldly in speculation; the mind of man, when its daily maxims are put before it, revolts from anything so stupid, so mean, so poor. It requires a consummate art to reconcile men in print to that moderate and insidious philosophy which creeps into all hearts, colours all speech, influences all action. We may not stiffen common-sense into a creed; our very ambition forbids:—

> "It hears a voice within us tell
> Calm's not life's crown, though calm is well:
> 'Tis all perhaps which man acquires;
> But 'tis not what our youth desires".[1]

Still a great artist may succeed in making "calm" interesting. Equanimity has its place in literature; the poetry of equipoise is possible. Poems of society have, thus, two divisions: that which we mentioned first, the expression of the feelings which are called out by the accidents of society; next, the harmonised expression of that philosophy of indifference with which the world regards the fortunes of individuals and its own.

We have said that no modern nation can produce literature embodying this kind of cool reflection and delineation as it was once produced. By way of compensation, however, it may be, it no doubt is, easier now to produce the lyrical kind of poems of society—the light expression of its light emotions—than it was in ancient times. Society itself is better. There is something hard in paganism, which is always felt even in the softest traits of the most delicate society in antiquity. The social influence of women in modern times gives an interest, a little pervading excitement, to social events. Civilisation, besides, has made comfort possible; it has, at least in part, created a scene in which society can be conducted. Its petty conveniences may or

[1] Matthew Arnold: "Youth and Calm".

may not be great benefits according to a recondite philosophy; but there can be no doubt that for actual men and women in actual conversation it is of the greatest importance that their feet should not be cold; that their eyes and mouths should not be troubled with smoke; that sofas should be good, and attractive chairs many. Modern times have the advantage of the ancient in the scenery of flirtation. The little boy complained that you could not find "drawing-room" in the dictionary. Perhaps even because our reflections are deeper, our inner life less purely pagan, our apparent life is softer and easier. Some have said, that one reason why physical science made so little progress in ancient times was, that people were in doubt about more interesting things; men must have, it has been alleged, a settled creed as to human life and human hopes, before they will attend to shells and snails and pressure. And whether this be so or not, perhaps a pleasant society is only possible to persons at ease as to what is beyond society. Those only can lie on the grass who fear no volcano underneath, and can bear to look at the blue vault above.

Among modern nations it is not difficult to say where we should look for success in the art of social poetry. "Wherever," said Mr. Lewes the other day, "the French go, they take what they call their civilisation—that is, a *café* and a theatre." And though this be a trifle severe, yet in its essence its meaning is correct. The French have in some manner or other put their mark on all the externals of European life. The essence of every country remains little affected by their teaching; but in all the superficial embellishments of society they have enjoined the fashion; and the very language in which those embellishments are spoken of, shows at once whence they were derived. Something of this is doubtless due to the accidents of a central position, and an early and prolonged political influence; but more to

a certain neatness of nature, a certain finish of the senses, which enables them more easily than others to touch lightly the light things of society, to see the *comme-il-faut.* "I like," said a good judge, "to hear a Frenchman talk; he strikes a light." On a hundred topics he gives the bright sharp edge, where others have only a blunt approximation.

Nor is this anticipation disappointed. Reviewers do not advance such theories unless they correspond with known results. For many years the French have not been more celebrated for memoirs which professedly describe a real society than they have been for the light social song which embodies its sentiments and pours forth its spirit. The principle on which such writings are composed is the taking some incident—not voluntarily (for the incident doubtless of itself takes a hold on the poet's mind)—and out of that incident developing all which there is in it. A grave form is of course inconsistent with such art. The spirit of such things is half-mirthful; a very profound meaning is rarely to be expected; but little incidents are not destitute of meaning, and a delicate touch will delineate it in words. A profound excitement likewise such poems cannot produce; they do not address the passions or the intuitions, the heart or the soul, but a gentle pleasure, half sympathy, half amusement, is that at which they aim. They do not please us equally in all moods of mind: sometimes they seem nothing and nonsense, like society itself. We must not be too active or too inactive, to like them; the tension of mind must not be too great; in our highest moods the littlenesses of life are petty; the mind must not be obtusely passive; light touches will not stimulate a sluggish inaction. This dependence on the mood of mind of the reader makes it dangerous to elucidate this sort of art by quotation; Béranger has, however, the following:—

" *Laideur et Beauté.*

" Sa trop grande beauté m'obsède ;
C'est un masque aisément trompeur.
Oui, je voudrais qu'elle fût laide,
Mais laide, laide à faire peur.
Belle ainsi faut-il que je l'aime !
Dieu, reprends ce don éclatant ;
Je le demande à l'enfer même :
Qu'elle soit laide et que je l'aime autant.

" A ces mots m'apparaît le diable ;
C'est le père de la laideur.
' Rendons-la,' dit-il, ' effroyable,
De tes rivaux trompons l'ardeur.
J'aime assez ces métamorphoses.
Ta belle ici vient en chantant ;
Perles, tombez ; fanez-vous, roses :
La voilà laide, et tu l'aimes autant.'

" —Laide ! moi ? dit-elle étonnée.
Elle s'approche d'un miroir,
Doute d'abord, puis, consternée,
Tombe en un morne désespoir.
' Pour moi seul tu jurais de vivre,'
Lui dis-je, à ses pieds me jetant ;
' A mon seul amour il te livre.
Plus laide encore, je t'aimerais autant.'

" Ses yeux éteints fondent en larmes,
Alors sa douleur m'attendrit.
' Ah ! rendez, rendez-lui ses charmes.'
' —Soit ! ' répond Satan, qui sourit.
Ainsi que naît la fraîche aurore,
Sa beauté renaît à l'instant.
Elle est, je crois, plus belle encore :
Elle est plus belle, et moi je l'aime autant.

" Vite au miroir elle s'assure
Qu'on lui rend bien tous ses appas ;
Des pleurs restent sur sa figure,
Qu'elle essuie en grondant tout bas,

Satan s'envole, et la cruelle
Fuit et s'écrie en me quittant :
' Jamais fille que Dieu fit belle
Ne doit aimer qui peut l'aimer autant '."

And this is even a more characteristic specimen :—

"*La Mouche.*

" Au bruit de notre gaîté folle,
Au bruit des verres, des chansons,
Quelle mouche murmure et vole,
Et revient quand nous la chassons ? (*bis.*)
C'est quelque dieu, je le soupçonne,
Qu'un peu de bonheur rend jaloux.
Ne souffrons point qu'elle bourdonne,
Qu'elle bourdonne autour de nous. } (*bis.*)

" Transformée en mouche hideuse,
Amis, oui, c'est, j'en suis certain,
La Raison, déité grondeuse,
Qu'irrite un si joyeux festin.
L'orage approche, le ciel tonne,
Voilà ce que dit son courroux.
Ne souffrons point qu'elle bourdonne,
Qu'elle bourdonne autour de nous.

" C'est la Raison qui vient me dire :
' A ton âge on vit en reclus.
Ne bois plus tant, cesse de rire,
Cesse d'aimer, ne chante plus.'
Ainsi son beffroi toujours sonne
Aux lueurs des feux les plus doux.
Ne souffrons point qu'elle bourdonne,
Qu'elle bourdonne autour de nous.

" C'est la Raison, gare à Lisette !
Son dard la menace toujours.
Dieux ! il perce la collerette :
Le sang coule ! accourez, Amours !
Amours ! poursuivez la félonne ;
Qu'elle expire enfin sous vos coups.
Ne souffrons point qu'elle bourdonne,
Qu'elle bourdonne autour de nous.

"Victoire! amis, elle se noie
Dans l'aï que Lise a versé.
Victoire! et qu'aux mains de la Joie
Le sceptre enfin soit replacé. (*bis.*)
Un souffle ébranle sa couronne;
Une mouche nous troublait tous.
Ne craignons plus qu'elle bourdonne, } (*bis.*)
Qu'elle bourdonne autour de nous." }

To make poetry out of a fly is a difficult operation. It used to be said of the Lake school of criticism, in Mr. Wordsworth's early and more rigid days, that there was no such term as "elegant" in its nomenclature. The reason is that, dealing, or attempting to deal, only with the essential aboriginal principles of human nature, that school had no room and no occasion for those minor contrivances of thought and language which are necessary to express the complex accumulation of little feelings, the secondary growth of human emotion. The underwood of nature is "elegant"; the bare ascending forest-tree despises what is so trivial,—it is grave and solemn. To such verses, on the other hand, as have been quoted, "elegance" is essential; the delicate finish of fleeting forms is the only excellence they can have.

The characteristic deficiencies of French literature have no room to show themselves in this class of art. "Though France herself denies," says a recent writer, "yet all other nations with one voice proclaim her inferiority to her rivals in poetry and romance, and in all the other elevated fields of fiction. A French Dante, or Michael Angelo, or Cervantes, or Murillo, or Goethe, or Shakespeare, or Milton, we at once perceive to be a mere anomaly; a supposition which may, indeed, be proposed in terms, but which in reality is inconceivable and impossible." In metaphysics, the reason seems to be that the French character is incapable of being mastered by an unseen idea, without being so tyrannised over by it as to be incapable of artistic development. Such

a character as Robespierre's may explain what we mean. His entire nature was taken up and absorbed in certain ideas; he had almost a vanity in them; he was of them, and they were of him. But they appear in his mind, in his speeches, in his life, in their driest and barest form; they have no motion, life, or roundness. We are obliged to use many metaphors remotely and with difficulty to indicate the procedure of the imagination. In one of these metaphors we figure an idea of imagination as a living thing, a kind of growing plant, with a peculiar form, and ever preserving its identity, but absorbing from the earth and air all kindred, suitable, and, so to say, annexable materials. In a mind such as Robespierre's, in the type of the fanatic mind, there is no such thing. The ideas seem a kind of dry hard capsules, never growing, never enlarging, never uniting. Development is denied them; they cannot expand, or ripen, or mellow. Dogma is a dry hard husk; poetry has the soft down of the real fruit. Ideas seize on the fanatic mind just as they do on the poetical; they have the same imperious ruling power. The difference is, that in the one the impelling force is immutable, iron, tyrannical; in the other the rule is expansive, growing, free, taking up from all around it moment by moment whatever is fit, as in the political world a great constitution arises through centuries, with a shape that does not vary, but with movement for its essence and the fluctuation of elements for its vitality. A thin poor mind like Robespierre's seems pressed and hampered by the bony fingers of a skeleton hand; a poet's is expanded and warmed at the same time that it is impelled by a pure life-blood of imagination. The French, as we have said, are hardly capable of this. When great remote ideas seize upon them at all, they become fanatics. The wild, chimerical, revolutionary, mad Frenchman has the stiffest of human minds. He is under the law of his creed; he has not

attained to the higher freedom of the impelling imagination. The prosing rhetoric of the French tragedy shows the same defect in another form. The ideas which should have become living realities, remain as lean abstractions. The characters are speaking officials, jets of attenuated oratory. But exactly on this very account the French mind has a genius for the poetry of society. Unable to remove itself into the higher region of imagined forms, it has the quickest detective insight into the exact relation of surrounding superficial phenomena. There are two ways of putting it: either being fascinated by the present, they cannot rise to what is not present; or being by defect of nature unable to rise to what is not present, they are concentrated and absorbed in that which is so. Of course there ought not to be, but there *is*, a world of *bonbons*, of *salons*, of *esprit*. Living in the present, they have the poetry of the present. The English genius is just the opposite. Our cumbrous intellect has no call to light artificialities. We do not excel in punctuated detail or nicely-squared elaboration. It puts us out of patience that others should. A respectable Englishman murmured in the *Café de Paris*, "I wish I had a hunch of mutton". He could not bear the secondary niceties with which he was surrounded. Our art has the same principle. We excel in strong, noble imagination, in solid stuff. Shakespeare is tough work; he has the play of the rising energy, the buoyant freedom of the unbounded mind; but no writer is so destitute of the simplifying dexterities of the manipulating intellect.

It is dangerous for a foreigner to give an opinion on *minutiæ* of style, especially on points affecting the characteristic excellences of national style. The French language is always neat; all French styles somehow seem good. But Béranger appears to have a peculiar neatness. He tells us that all his songs are the production of a painful effort. If

so, the reader should be most grateful; *he* suffers no pain. The delicate elaboration of the writer has given a singular currency to the words. Difficult writing is rarely easy reading. It can never be so when the labour is spent in piecing together elements not joined by an insensible touch of imagination. The highest praise is due to a writer whose ideas are more delicately connected by unconscious genius than other men's are, and yet who spends labour and toil in giving the production a yet cunninger finish, a still smoother connection. The characteristic aloofness of the Gothic mind, its tendency to devote itself to what is not present, is represented in composition by a want of care in the pettinesses of style. A certain clumsiness pervades all tongues of German origin. Instead of the language having been sharpened and improved by the constant keenness of attentive minds, it has been habitually used obtusely and crudely. Light, loquacious Gaul has for ages been the contrast. If you take up a pen just used by a good writer, for a moment you seem to write rather well. A language long employed by a delicate and critical society is a treasure of dexterous felicities. It is not, according to the fine expression of Mr. Emerson, "fossil poetry"; [1] it is crystallised *esprit*.

A French critic has praised Béranger for having retained the *refrain*, or burden, "*la rime de l'air*," as he calls it. Perhaps music is more necessary as an accompaniment to the poetry of society than it is to any other poetry. Without a sensuous reminder, we might forget that it was poetry; especially in a sparkling, glittering, attenuated language, we might be absorbed as in the defined elegances of prose. In half-trivial compositions we easily forget the little central fancy. The music prevents this: it gives oneness to the

[1] Essay on "The Poet".

parts, pieces together the shavings of the intellect, makes audible the flow of imagination.

The poetry of society tends to the poetry of love. All poetry tends that way. By some very subtle links, which no metaphysician has skilfully tracked, the imagination, even in effects and employments which seem remote, is singularly so connected. One smiles to see the feeling recur. Half the poets can scarcely keep away from it: in the high and dry epic you may see the poet return to it. And perhaps this is not unaccountable. The more delicate and stealing the sensuous element, the more the mind is disposed to brood upon it; the more we dwell on it in stillness, the more it influences the wandering, hovering faculty which we term imagination. The first constructive effort of imagination is beyond the limit of consciousness; the faculty works unseen. But we know that it works in a certain soft leisure only: and this in ordinary minds is almost confined to, in the highest is most commonly accompanied by, the subtlest emotion of reverie. So insinuating is that feeling, that no poet is alive to all its influences; so potent is it, that the words of a great poet, in our complex modern time, are rarely ever free from its traces. The phrase "stealing calm," which most naturally and graphically describes the state of soul in which the imagination works, quite equally expresses, it is said, the coming in and continuance of the not uncommon emotion. Passing, however, from such metaphysics, there is no difficulty in believing that the poetry of society will tend to the most romantic part of society,—away from aunts and uncles, antiquaries and wigs, to younger and pleasanter elements. The talk of society does so; probably its literature will do so likewise. There are, nevertheless, some limiting considerations, which make this tendency less all-powerful than we might expect it to be. In the first place, the poetry of society cannot deal with passion. Its light touch is not

competent to express eager, intense emotion. Rather, we should say, the essential nature of the poetry of amusement is inconsistent with those rugged, firm, aboriginal elements which passion brings to the surface. The volcano is inconsistent with careless talk; you cannot comfortably associate with lava. Such songs as those of Burns are the very antithesis to the levity of society. A certain explicitness pervades them :—

> "Come, let me take thee to my breast,
> And pledge we ne'er shall sunder;
> And I shall spurn as vilest dust
> The warld's wealth and grandeur".

There is a story of his having addressed a lady in society, some time after he came to Edinburgh, in this direct style, and being offended that she took notice of it. The verses were in English, and were not intended to mean anything particular, only to be an elegant attention; but you might as well ask a young lady to take brandy with you as compliment her in this intense manner. The eager peasant-poet was at fault in the polished refinements of the half-feeling drawing-room. Again, the poetry of society can scarcely deal with affection. No poetry, except in hints, and for moments, perhaps ever can. You might as well tell secrets to the town-crier. The essence of poetry somehow is publicity. It is very odd when one reads many of the sentiments which are expressed there,—the brooding thought, the delicate feeling, the high conception. What is the use of telling these to the mass of men? Will the grocer feel them?—will the greasy butcher in the blue coat feel them? Are there not some emphatic remarks by Lord Byron on Mr. Sanders ("the d—d saltfish seller" of Venice),[1] who could not appreciate

[1] Moore's *Byron*.

Don Juan? Nevertheless, for some subtle reason or other, poets do crave, almost more than other men, the public approbation. To have a work of art in your imagination, and that no one else should know of it, is a great pain. But even this craving has its limits. Art can only deal with the universal. Characters, sentiments, actions, must be described in what in the old language might be called their conceptual shape. There must always be an idea in them. If we compare a great character in fiction, say that of Hamlet, with a well-known character in life, we are struck almost at once by the typical and representative nature of the former. We seem to have a more *summary* conception of it, if the phrase may be allowed, than we have of the people we know best in reality. Indeed, our notion of the fictitious character rather resembles a notion of actual persons of whom we know a little, and but a little,—of a public man, suppose, of whom from his speeches and writings we know something, but with whom we never exchanged a word. We generalise a few traits; we do what the historian will have to do hereafter; we *make* a man, so to speak, resembling the real one, but more defined, more simple and comprehensible. The objects on which affection turns are exactly the opposite. In their essence they are individual, peculiar. Perhaps they become known under a kind of confidence; but even if not, Nature has hallowed the details of near life by an inevitable secrecy. You cannot expect other persons to feel them; you cannot tell your own intellect what they are. An individuality lurks in our nature. Each soul (as the divines speak) clings to each soul. Poetry is impossible on such points as these: they seem too sacred, too essential. The most that it can do is, by hints and little marks in the interstices of a universalised delineation, to suggest that there is something more than what is stated, and more inward and potent than what is stated. Affection as a settled subject is incompatible

with art. And thus the poetry of society is limited on its romantic side in two ways: first, by the infinite, intense nature of passion, which forces the voice of art beyond the social tone; and by the confidential, incomprehensible nature of affection, which will not bear to be developed for the public by the fancy in any way.

Being so bounded within the ordinary sphere of their art, poets of this world have contrived or found a substitute. In every country there is a society which is no society. The French, which is the most worldly of literatures, has devoted itself to the delineation of this outside world. There is no form, comic or serious, dramatic or lyrical, in which the subject has not been treated: the burden is—

> " Lisette, ma Lisette,
> Tu m'as trompé toujours;
> Mais vive la grisette!
> Je veux, Lisette,
> Boire à nos amours."

There is obviously no need of affection in *this* society. The whole plot of the notorious novel, *La Dame aux Camélias*,—and a very remarkable one it is,—is founded on the incongruity of real feeling with this world, and the singular and inappropriate consequences which result, if, by any rare chance, it does appear there. Passion is almost *a fortiori* out of the question. The depths of human nature have nothing to do with this life. On this account, perhaps, it is that it harmonises so little with the English literature and character. An Englishman can scarcely live on the surface; his passions are too strong, his power of *finesse* too little. Accordingly, since Defoe, who treated the subject with a coarse matter-of-factness, there has been nothing in our literature of this kind—nothing at least professedly devoted to it. How far this is due to real excellence, how far to the *bourgeois* and not very outspoken temper of our recent

writers, we need not in this place discuss. There is no occasion to quote in this country the early poetry of Béranger, at least not the sentimental part of it. We may take, in preference, one of his poems written in old, or rather in middle age:—

"*Cinquante Ans.*

" Pourquoi ces fleurs ? est-ce ma fête ?
Non ; ce bouquet vient m'annoncer
Qu'un demi-siècle sur ma tête
Achève aujourd'hui de passer.
Oh ! combien nos jours sont rapides !
Oh ! combien j'ai perdu d'instants !
Oh ! combien je me sens de rides !
Hélas ! hélas ! j'ai cinquante ans.

" A cet âge, tout nous échappe ;
Le fruit meurt sur l'arbre jauni.
Mais à ma porte quelqu'un frappe ;
N'ouvrons point : mon rôle est fini.
C'est, je gage, un docteur qui jette
Sa carte, où s'est logé le Temps.
Jadis, j'aurais dit : C'est Lisette.
Hélas ! hélas ! j'ai cinquante ans.

" En maux cuisants vieillesse abonde :
C'est la goutte qui nous meurtrit ;
La cécité, prison profonde ;
La surdité, dont chacun rit.
Puis la raison, lampe qui baisse,
N'a plus que des feux tremblotants.
Enfants, honorez la vieillesse !
Hélas ! hélas ! j'ai cinquante ans !

" Ciel ! j'entends la Mort, qui, joyeuse,
Arrive en se frottant les mains.
A ma porte la fossoyeuse
Frappe ; adieu, messieurs les humains !
En bas, guerre, famine et peste ;
En haut, plus d'astres éclatants.
Ouvrons, tandis que Dieu me reste.
Hélas ! hélas ! j'ai cinquante ans.

" Mais non ; c'est vous ! vous, jeune amie,
Sœur de charité des amours !
Vous tirez mon âme endormie
Du cauchemar des mauvais jours.
Semant les roses de votre âge
Partout, comme fait le printemps,
Parfumez les rêves d'un sage.
Hélas ! hélas ! j'ai cinquante ans."

This is the last scene of the *grisette*, of whom we read in so many songs sparkling with youth and gaiety.

A certain intellectuality, however, pervades Béranger's love-songs. You seem to feel, to see, not merely the emotion, but the mind, in the background viewing that emotion. You are conscious of a considerateness qualifying and contrasting with the effervescing champagne of the feelings described. Desire is rarefied ; sense half becomes an idea. You may trace a similar metamorphosis in the poetry of passion itself. If we contrast such a poem as Shelley's " Epipsychidion " with the natural language of common passion, we see how curiously the intellect can take its share in the dizziness of sense. In the same way, in the lightest poems of Béranger we feel that it may be infused, may interpenetrate the most buoyant effervescence.

Nothing is more odd than to contrast the luxurious and voluptuous nature of much of Béranger's poetry with the circumstances of his life. He never in all his productive time had more than £80 a year ; the smallest party of pleasure made him live, he tells us himself, most ascetically for a week ; so far from leading the life of a Sybarite, his youth was one of anxiety and privation. A more worldly poet has probably never written, but no poet has shown in life so philosophic an estimate of this world's goods. His origin is very unaristocratic. He was born in August, 1780, at the house of his grandfather, a poor old tailor. Of his mother

we hear nothing. His father was a speculative, sanguine man, who never succeeded. His principal education was given him by an aunt, who taught him to read and to write, and perhaps generally incited his mind. His school-teaching tells of the philosophy of the revolutionary time. By way of primary school for the town of Péronne, a patriotic member of the National Assembly had founded an *institut d'enfants*. "It offered," we are told, "at once the image of a club and that of a camp; the boys wore a military uniform; at every public event they named deputations, delivered orations, voted addresses: letters were written to the citizen Robespierre and the citizen Tallien." Naturally, amid such great affairs there was no time for mere grammar; they did not teach *Latin*. Nor did Béranger ever acquire any knowledge of that language; and he may be said to be destitute of what is in the usual sense called culture. Accordingly, it has in these days been made a matter of wonder by critics, whom we may think pedantic, that one so destitute should be able to produce such works. But a far keener judge has pronounced the contrary. Goethe, who certainly did not undervalue the most elaborate and artful cultivation, at once pronounced Béranger to have "a nature most happily endowed, firmly grounded in himself, purely developed from himself, and quite in harmony with himself".[1] In fact, as these words mean, Béranger, by happiness of nature or self-attention, has that *centrality* of mind, which is the really valuable result of colleges and teaching. He puts things together; he refers things to a principle; rather, they group themselves in his intelligence insensibly round a principle. There is nothing *distrait* in his genius; the man has attained to be himself; a cool oneness, a poised personality pervades him. "The unlearned," it has been said, "judge at random." Béranger is not unlearned in this sense. There is no one

[1] Conversations with Eckermann and Soret, 4th May, 1830.

who judges more simply, smoothly, and uniformly. His ideas refer to an exact measure. He has mastered what comes before him. And though doubtless unacquainted with foreign and incongruous literatures, he has mastered his own literature, which was shaped by kindred persons, and has been the expression of analogous natures; and this has helped him in expressing himself.

In the same way, his poor youth and boyhood have given a reality to his productions. He seems to have had this in mind in praising the "practical education which I have received". He was bred a printer; and the highest post he attained was a clerkship at the university, worth, as has been said, £80 per annum. Accordingly he has everywhere a sympathy with the common people, an unsought familiarity with them and their life. Sybarite poetry commonly wants this. The aristocratic nature is superficial; it relates to a life protected from simple wants, depending on luxurious artifices. "Mamma," said the simple-minded young nobleman, "when poor people have no bread, why do not they eat buns? they are much better." An over-perfumed softness pervades the poetry of society. You see this in the songs of Moore, the best of the sort we have; all is beautiful, soft, half-sincere. There is a little falsetto in the tone, everything reminds you of the drawing-room and the *pianoforte;* and not only so—for all poetry of society must in a measure do this—but it seems fit for no other scene. Naturalness is the last word of praise that would be suitable. In the scented air we forget that there is a *pavé* and a multitude. Perhaps France is of all countries which have ever existed the one in which we might seek an exception from this luxurious limitation. A certain *égalité* may pervade its art as its society. There is no such difference as with us between the shoeblack and the gentleman. A certain refinement is very common; an extreme refinement

possibly rare. Béranger was able to write his poems in poverty: they are popular with the poor.

A success even greater than what we have described as having been achieved by Béranger in the first class of the poems of society—that of amusement—has been attained by him in the second class, expressive of epicurean speculation. Perhaps it is one of his characteristics that the two are for ever running one into another. There is animation in his thinking; there is meaning in his gaiety. It requires no elaborate explanation to make evident the connection between scepticism and luxuriousness. Every one thinks of the Sadducee as in cool halls and soft robes; no one supposes that the Sybarite believes. Pain not only purifies the mind, but deepens the nature. A simple, happy life is animal; it is pleasant, and it perishes. All writers who have devoted themselves to the explanation of this world's view of itself are necessarily in a certain measure Sadducees. The world is Sadducee itself; it cannot be anything else without recognising a higher creed, a more binding law, a more solemn reality—without ceasing to be the world. Equanimity is incredulous; impartiality does not care; an indifferent politeness is sceptical. Though not a single speculative opinion is expressed, we may feel this in "Roger Bontemps":—

"*Roger Bontemps.*

"Aux gens atrabilaires
Pour exemple donné,
En un temps de misères
Roger Bontemps est né.
Vivre obscur à sa guise,
Narguer les mécontents:
Eh gai! c'est la devise
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

"Du chapeau de son père
Coiffé dans les grands jours,

De roses ou de lierre
Le rajeunir toujours ;
Mettre un manteau de bure,
Vieil ami de vingt ans :
Eh gai ! c'est la parure
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Posséder dans sa hutte
Une table, un vieux lit,
Des cartes, une flûte,
Un broc que Dieu remplit,
Un portrait de maîtresse,
Un coffre et rien dedans :
Eh gai ! c'est la richesse
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Aux enfants de la ville
Montrer de petits jeux ;
Etre un faiseur habile
De contes graveleux ;
Ne parler que de danse
Et d'almanachs chantants :
Eh gai ! c'est la science
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Faute de vin d'élite,
Sabler ceux du canton ;
Préférer Marguerite
Aux dames du grand ton ;
De joie et de tendresse
Remplir tous ses instants :
Eh gai ! c'est la sagesse
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Dire au Ciel : Je me fie,
Mon père, à ta bonté ;
De ma philosophie
Pardonne la gaîté ;
Que ma saison dernière
Soit encore un printemps :
Eh gai ! c'est la prière
Du gros Roger Bontemps.

" Vous, pauvres pleins d'envie,
Vous, riches désireux,
Vous, dont le char dévie
Après un cours heureux;
Vous, qui perdrez peut-être
Des titres éclatants,
Eh gai! prenez pour maître
Le gros Roger Bontemps."

At the same time, in Béranger the scepticism is not extreme. The skeleton is not paraded. That the world is a passing show, a painted scene, is admitted; you seem to know that it is all acting and rouge and illusion: still the pleasantness of the acting is dwelt on, the rouge is never rubbed off, the dream runs lightly and easily. No nightmare haunts you, you have no uneasy sense that you are about to awaken. Persons who require a sense of reality may complain; pain is perhaps necessary to sharpen their nerves, a tough effort to harden their consciousness: but if you pass by this objection of the threshold, if you admit the possibility of a superficial and fleeting world, you will not find a better one than Béranger's world. Suppose all the world were a *restaurant*, his is a good *restaurant;* admit that life is an effervescing champagne, his is the best for the moment.

In several respects Béranger contrasts with Horace, the poet whom in general he most resembles. The song of "Roger Bontemps" suggests one of the most obvious differences. It is essentially democratic. As we have said before, Béranger is the poet of the people; he himself says, *Le peuple c'est ma muse.* Throughout Horace's writings, however much he may speak, and speak justly, of the simplicity of his tastes, you are always conscious that his position is exceptional. Everybody cannot be the friend of Mæcenas; every cheerful man of the world cannot see the springs of the great world. The intellect of most self-indulgent men must satisfy itself with small indulgences. Without a hard ascent

you can rarely see a great view. Horace had the almost unequalled felicity of watching the characters and thoughts and tendencies of the governors of the world, the nicest manipulation of the most ingenious statesmen, the inner tastes and predilections which are the origin of the most important transactions; and yet had the ease and pleasantness of the common and effortless life. So rare a fortune cannot be a general model; the gospel of Epicureanism must not ask a close imitation of one who had such very special advantages. Béranger gives the acceptors of that creed a commoner type. Out of nothing but the most ordinary advantages—the garret, the almost empty purse, the not over-attired *grisette*—he has given them a model of the sparkling and quick existence for which their fancy is longing. You cannot imagine commoner materials. In another respect Horace and Béranger are remarkably contrasted. Béranger, sceptical and indifferent as he is, has a faith in, and zeal for, liberty. It seems odd that he should care for that sort of thing; but he does care for it. Horace probably had a little personal shame attaching to such ideas. No regimental officer of our own time can have "joined" in a state of more crass ignorance, than did the stout little student from Athens in all probability join the army of Brutus; the legionaries must have taken the measure of him, as the sergeants of our living friends. Anyhow he was not partial to such reflections; zeal for political institutions is quite as foreign to him as any other zeal. A certain hope in the future is characteristic of Béranger—

> "Qui découvrit un nouveau monde?
> Un fou qu'on raillait en tout lieu."

Modern faith colours even bystanding scepticism. Though probably with no very accurate ideas of the nature of liberty, Béranger believes that it is a great good, and that France will have it.

The point in which Béranger most resembles Horace is that which is the most essential in the characters of them both —their geniality. This is the very essence of the poems of society; it springs in the verses of amusement, it harmonises with acquiescing sympathy the poems of indifference. And yet few qualities in writing are so rare. A certain malevolence enters into literary ink; the point of the pen pricks. Pope is the very best example of this. With every desire to imitate Horace, he cannot touch any of his subjects, or any kindred subjects, without infusing a bitter ingredient. It is not given to the children of men to be philosophers without envy. Lookers-on can hardly bear the spectacle of the great world. If you watch the carriages rolling down to the House of Lords, you will try to depreciate the House of Lords. Idleness is cynical. Both Béranger and Horace are exceptions to this. Both enjoy the roll of the wheels; both love the glitter of the carriages; neither is angry at the sun. Each knows that he is as happy as he can be—that he is all that he can be in his contemplative philosophy. In his means of expression for the purpose in hand, the Frenchman has the advantage. The Latin language is clumsy. Light pleasure was an exotic in the Roman world; the terms in which you strive to describe it suit rather the shrill camp and droning law-court. In English, as we hinted just now, we have this too. Business is in our words; a too heavy sense clogs our literature; even in a writer so apt as Pope at the *finesse* of words, you feel that the solid Gothic roots impede him. It is difficult not to be cumbrous. The horse may be fleet and light, but the wheels are ponderous and the road goes heavily. Béranger certainly has not this difficulty; nobody ever denied that a Frenchman could be light, that the French language was adapted for levity.

When we ascribed an absence of bitterness and malevolence to Béranger, we were far from meaning that he is

not a satirist. Every light writer in a measure must be so. Mirth is the imagery of society; and mirth must make fun of somebody. The nineteenth century has not had many shrewder critics than its easy-natured poet. Its intense dulness particularly strikes him. He dreads the dreariness of the Academy; pomposity bores him; formalism tires him; he thinks, and may well think, it dreary to have

> "Pour grands hommes des journalistes,
> Pour amusement l'Opéra".

But skilful as is the mirth, its spirit is genial and good-natured. "You have been laughing at me constantly, Sydney, for the last seven years," said a friend to the late Canon of St. Paul's, "and yet in all that time you never said a single thing to me that I wished unsaid." [1] So far as its essential features are concerned, the nineteenth century may say the same of its musical satirist. Perhaps, however, the Bourbons might a little object. Clever people have always a *little* malice against the stupid.

There is no more striking example of the degree in which the gospel of good works has penetrated our modern society, than that Béranger has talked of "utilising his talent". The epicurean poet considers that he has been a political missionary. Well may others be condemned to the penal servitude of industry, if the lightest and idlest of skilful men boasts of being subjected to it. If Béranger thinks it necessary to think that he has been useful, others may well think so too; let us accept the heavy doctrine of hard labour; there is no other way to heave off the rubbish of this world. The mode in which Béranger is anxious to prove that he made his genius of use, is by diffusing a taste for liberty, and expressing an enthusiasm for it; and also, as we suppose,

[1] Dudley: *Lady Holland's Memoirs of Sydney Smith*, chap. xi.

by quizzing those rulers of France who have not shared either the taste or the enthusiasm. Although, however, such may be the idea of the poet himself, posterity will scarcely confirm it. Political satire is the most ephemeral kind of literature. The circumstances to which it applies are local and temporary; the persons to whom it applies die. A very few months will make unintelligible what was at first strikingly plain. Béranger has illustrated this by an admission. There was a delay in publishing the last volume of his poems, many of which relate to the years or months immediately preceding the Revolution of 1830; the delay was not long, as the volume appeared in the first month of 1833, yet he says that many of the songs relate to the passing occurrences of a period "*déjà loin de nous*". On so shifting a scene as that of French political life, the jests of each act are forgotten with the act itself; the eager interest of each moment withdraws the mind from thinking of or dwelling on anything past. And in all countries administration is ephemeral; what relates to it is transitory. Satires on its detail are like the jests of a public office; the clerks change, oblivion covers their peculiarities; the point of the joke is forgotten. There are some considerable exceptions to the saying that foreign literary opinion is a "contemporary posterity"; but in relation to satires on transitory transactions it is exactly expressive. No Englishman will now care for many of Béranger's songs which were once in the mouths of all his countrymen, which coloured the manners of revolutions, perhaps influenced their course. The fame of a poet may have a reference to politics; but it will be only to the wider species, to those social questions which never die, the elements of that active human nature which is the same age after age. Béranger can hardly hope for this. Even the songs which relate to liberty can hardly hope for this immortality. They have the vagueness which has made

French aspirations for freedom futile. So far as they express distinct feeling, their tendency is rather anti-aristocratic than in favour of simple real liberty. And an objection to mere rank, though a potent, is neither a very agreeable nor a very poetical sentiment. Moreover, when the love of liberty is to be imaginatively expressed, it requires to an Englishman's ear a sound bigger and more trumpet-tongued than the voice of Béranger.

On a deeper view, however, an attentive student will discover a great deal that is most instructive in the political career of the not very business-like poet. His life has been contemporaneous with the course of a great change; and throughout it the view which he has taken of the current events is that which sensible men took at the time, and which a sensible posterity (and these events will from their size attract attention enough to insure their being viewed sensibly) is likely to take. Béranger was present at the taking of the Bastille, but he was then only nine years old; the accuracy of opinion which we are claiming for him did not commence so early. His mature judgment begins with the career of Napoleon; and no one of the thousands who have written on that subject has viewed it perhaps more justly. He had no love for the despotism of the Empire, was alive to the harshness of its administration, did not care too much for its glory, must have felt more than once the social exhaustion. At the same time, no man was penetrated more profoundly, no literary man half so profoundly, with the popular admiration for the genius of the empire. His own verse has given the truest and most lasting expression of it:—

"*Les Souvenirs du Peuple.*

"On parlera de sa gloire
Sous le chaume bien longtemps.
L'humble toit, dans cinquante ans,
Ne connaîtra plus d'autre histoire.

Là viendront les villageois,
Dire alors à quelque vieille :
' Par des récits d'autrefois,
Mère, abrégez notre veille.
Bien, dit-on, qu'il nous ait nui,
Le peuple encor le révère,
Oui, le révère.
Parlez-nous de lui, grand'mère ;
Parlez-nous de lui.' (*bis.*)

" ' Mes enfants, dans ce village,
Suivi de rois, il passa.
Voilà bien longtemps de ça :
Je venais d'entrer en ménage.
A pied grimpant le coteau
Où pour voir je m'étais mise,
Il avait petit chapeau
Avec redingote grise.
Près de lui je me troublai ;
Il me dit : " Bonjour, ma chère,
Bonjour, ma chère ".'
—' Il vous a parlé, grand'mère !
Il vous a parlé ! '

" ' L'an d'après, moi, pauvre femme,
A Paris étant un jour,
Je le vis avec sa cour :
Il se rendait à Notre-Dame.
Tous les cœurs étaient contents ;
On admirait son cortége.
Chacun disait : " Quel beau temps !
Le ciel toujours le protége ".
Son sourire était bien doux,
D'un fils Dieu le rendait père,
Le rendait père.'
—' Quel beau jour pour vous, grand'mère
Quel beau jour pour vous ! '

" ' Mais, quand la pauvre Champagne
Fut en proie aux étrangers,
Lui, bravant tous les dangers,
Semblait seul tenir la campagne.

Un soir, tout comme aujourd'hui,
J'entends frapper à la porte.
J'ouvre. Bon Dieu ! c'était lui,
Suivi d'une faible escorte.
Il s'asseoit où me voilà,
S'écriant : " Oh ! quelle guerre !
Oh ! quelle guerre ! " '
—' Il s'est assis là, grand'mère !
Il s'est assis là ! '

" ' J'ai faim,' dit-il ; ' et bien vite
Je sers piquette et pain bis ;
Puis il sèche ses habits,
Même à dormir le feu l'invite.
Au réveil, voyant mes pleurs,
Il me dit : " Bonne espérance !
Je cours, de tous ses malheurs,
Sous Paris, venger la France ".
Il part ; et, comme un trésor,
J'ai depuis gardé son verre,
Gardé son verre.'
' Vous l'avez encor, grand'mère !
Vous l'avez encor ! '

" ' Le voici. Mais à sa perte
Le héros fut entraîné.
Lui, qu'un pape a couronné,
Est mort dans une île déserte.
Longtemps aucun ne l'a cru ;
On disait : " Il va paraître ;
Par mer il est accouru ;
L'étranger va voir son maître ".
Quand d'erreur on nous tira,
Ma douleur fut bien amère !
Fut bien amère ! '
—' Dieu vous bénira, grand'mère ;
Dieu vous bénira.' "

This is a great exception to the transitoriness of political poetry. Such a character as that of Napoleon displayed on so large a stage, so great a genius amid such scenery of

action, insures an immortality. "The page of universal history" which he was always coveting, he has attained; and it is a page which, from its singularity and its errors, its shame and its glory, will distract the attention from other pages. No one who has ever had in his mind the idea of Napoleon's character can forget it. Nothing too can be more natural than that the French should remember it. His character possessed the primary imagination, the elementary conceiving power, in which they are deficient. So far from being restricted to the poetry of society, he would not have even appreciated it. A certain bareness marks his mind; his style is curt; the imaginative product is left rude; there is the distinct abstraction of the military diagram. The tact of light and passing talk, the detective imagination which is akin to that tact, and discovers the quick essence of social things,—he never had. In speaking of his power over popular fancies, Béranger has called him "the greatest poet of modern times". No genius can be more unlike his own, and therefore perhaps it is that he admires it so much. During the Hundred Days, Béranger says he was never under the delusion, then not rare, that the Emperor could become a constitutional monarch. The lion, he felt, would not change his skin. After the return of the Bourbons, he says, doubtless with truth, that his "*instinct du peuple*" told him they could never ally themselves with liberal principles, or unite with that new order of society which, though dating from the Revolution, had acquired in five and twenty years a half-prescriptive right. They and their followers came in to *take* possession, and it was impossible they could unite with what *was* in possession. During the whole reign of the hereditary Bourbon dynasty, Béranger was in opposition. Representing the natural sentiments of the new Frenchman, he could not bear the natural tendency of the ruling power to the half-forgotten practices of old France. The legitimate

Bourbons were by their position the chieftains of the party advocating their right by birth; they could not be the kings of a people; and the poet of the people was against them. After the genius of Napoleon, all other governing minds would seem tame and contracted; and Charles X. was not a man to diminish the inevitable feeling. Béranger despised him. As the poet warred with the weapons of poetry, the Government retorted with the penalties of State. He was turned out of his petty clerkship, he was twice imprisoned; but these things only increased his popularity; and a firm and genial mind, so far from being moved, sang songs at La Force itself. The Revolution of 1830 was willing to make his fortune.

"Je l'ai traitée," he says, "comme une puissance qui peut avoir des caprices auxquels il faut être en mesure de résister. Tous ou presque tous mes amis ont passé au ministère: j'en ai même encore un ou deux qui restent suspendus à ce mât de cocagne. Je me plais à croire qu'ils y sont accrochés par la basque, malgré les efforts qu'ils font pour descendre. J'aurais donc pu avoir part à la distribution des emplois. Malheureusement je n'ai pas l'amour des sinécures, et tout travail obligé m'est devenu insupportable, hors peut-être encore celui d'expéditionnaire. Des médisants ont prétendu que je faisais de la vertu. Fi donc! je faisais de la paresse. Ce défaut m'a tenu lieu de bien des qualités; aussi je le recommande à beaucoup de nos honnêtes gens. Il expose pourtant à de singuliers reproches. C'est à cette paresse si douce, que des censeurs rigides ont attribué l'éloignement où je me suis tenu de ceux de mes honorables amis qui ont eu le malheur d'arriver au pouvoir. Faisant trop d'honneur à ce qu'ils veulent bien appeler ma bonne tête, et oubliant trop combien il y a loin du simple bon sens à la science des grandes affaires, ces censeurs prétendent que mes conseils eussent éclairé plus d'un ministre. A les croire, tapi derrière le fauteuil de velours de nos hommes d'état, j'aurais conjuré les vents, dissipé les orages, et fait nager la France dans un océan de délices. Nous aurions tous de la liberté à revendre ou plutôt à donner, car nous n'en savons pas bien encore le prix. Eh! messieurs mes deux ou trois amis, qui prenez un chansonnier pour un magicien, on ne vous a donc pas dit que le pouvoir est une cloche qui empêche ceux qui la mettent en branle

d'entendre aucun autre son? Sans doute des ministres consultent quelquefois ceux qu'ils ont sous la main: consulter est un moyen de parler de soi qu'on néglige rarement. Mais il ne suffirait pas de consulter de bonne foi des gens qui conseilleraient de même. Il faudrait encore exécuter: ceci est la part du caractère. Les intentions les plus pures, le patriotisme le plus éclairé ne le donnent pas toujours. Qui n'a vu de hauts personnages quitter un donneur d'avis avec une pensée courageuse, et, l'instant d'après, revenir vers lui, de je ne sais quel lieu de fascination, avec l'embarras d'un démenti donné aux résolutions les plus sages? 'Oh!' disent-ils, 'nous n'y serons plus repris! quelle galère!' Le plus honteux ajoute: 'Je voudrais bien vous voir à ma place!' Quand un ministre dit cela, soyez sûr qu'il n'a plus la tête à lui. Cependant il en est un, mais un seul, qui, sans avoir perdu la tête a répété souvent ce mot de la meilleure foi du monde; aussi ne l'addressait-il jamais à un ami." [1]

The statesman alluded to in the last paragraph is Manuel, his intimate friend, from whom he declares he could never have been separated, but whose death prevented his obtaining political honours. Nobody can read the above passage without feeling its tone of political sense. An enthusiasm for, yet half distrust of, the Revolution of July seems as sound a sentiment as could be looked for even in the most sensible contemporary. What he has thought of the present dynasty we do not know. He probably has as little concurred in the silly encomiums of its mere partisans as in the wild execrations of its disappointed enemies. His opinion could not have been either that of the English who *fêted* Louis Napoleon in 1855, or of those who despised him in 1851. The political fortunes of France during the last ten years must have been a painful scene of observation to one who remembered the taking of the Bastille. If there be such a thing as failure in the world, this looks like it.

Although we are very far from thinking that Béranger's claims on posterity are founded on his having utilised his talent in favour of liberty, it is very natural that he should

[1] Preface to *Chansons*.

think or half-think himself that it is so. His power over the multitude must have given him great pleasure; it is something to be able to write mottoes for a revolution; to write words for people to use, and hear people use those words. The same sort of pleasure which Horace derived from his nearness to the centre of great action, Béranger has derived from the power which his thorough sympathy with his countrymen has given him over them. A political satire may be ephemeral from the rapid oblivion of its circumstances; but it is not unnatural that the author, inevitably proud of its effect, may consider it of higher worth than mere verses of society.

This shrewd sense gives a solidity to the verses of Béranger which the social and amusing sort of poetry commonly wants; but nothing can redeem it from the reproach of wanting "*back* thought".[1] This is inevitable in such literature; as it professes to delineate for us the light essence of a fugitive world, it cannot be expected to dwell on those deep and eternal principles on which that world is based. It ignores them as light talk ignores them. The most opposite thing to the poetry of society is the poetry of inspiration. There exists, of course, a kind of imagination which detects the secrets of the universe—which fills us sometimes with dread, sometimes with hope—which awakens the soul, which makes pure the feelings, which explains Nature, reveals what is above Nature, chastens "the deep heart of man".[2] Our senses teach us what the world is; our intuitions where it is. We see the blue and gold of the world, its lively amusements, its gorgeous if superficial splendour, its currents of men; we feel its light spirits, we enjoy its happiness; we enjoy it, and we are puzzled. What is the object of all this? Why do we do all this? What is the universe *for?* Such a book as Béranger's suggests

[1] Derwent Coleridge on Hartley. [2] Shelley: "Alastor".

this difficulty in its strongest form. It embodies the essence of all that pleasure-loving, pleasure-giving, unaccountable world in which men spend their lives,—which they are compelled to live in, but which the moment you get out of it seems so odd that you can hardly believe it is real. On this account, as we were saying before, there is no book the impression of which varies so much in different moods of mind. Sometimes no reading is so pleasant; at others you half-despise and half-hate the idea of it; it seems to sum up and make clear the littleness of your own nature. Few can bear the theory of their amusements; it is essential to the pride of man to believe that he is industrious. We are irritated at literary laughter, and wroth at printed mirth. We turn angrily away to that higher poetry which gives the outline within which all these light colours are painted. From the capital of levity, and its self-amusing crowds; from the elastic *vaudeville* and the grinning actors; from *chansons* and *cafés* we turn away to the solemn in Nature, to the blue over-arching sky: the one remains, the many pass; no number of seasons impairs the bloom of those hues, they are as soft to-morrow as to-day. The immeasurable depth folds us in. "Eternity," as the original thinker said, "is everlasting." We breathe a deep breath. And perhaps we have higher moments. We comprehend the "unintelligible world";[1] we see into "the life of things";[2] we fancy we know whence we come and whither we go; words we have repeated for years have a meaning for the first time; texts of old Scripture seem to apply to *us*. . . . And—and—Mr. Thackeray would say, You come back into the town, and order dinner at a *restaurant*, and read Béranger once more.

And though this is true—though the author of "Le Dieu des Bonnes Gens" has certainly no claim to be called a

[1] Wordsworth: "Tintern Abbey". [2] *Ibid.*

profound divine—though we do not find in him any proper expression, scarcely any momentary recognition, of those intuitions which explain in a measure the scheme and idea of things, and form the back thought and inner structure of such minds as ours,—his sense and sympathy with the people enable him, perhaps compel him, to delineate those essential conditions which constitute the structure of exterior life, and determine with inevitable certainty the common life of common persons. He has no call to deal with heaven or the universe, but he knows the earth; he is restricted to the boundaries of time, but he understands time. He has extended his delineations beyond what in this country would be considered correct; "Les Cinq Étages" can scarcely be quoted here; but a perhaps higher example of the same kind of art may be so:—

"*Le Vieux Vagabond.*

" Dans ce fossé cessons de vivre;
Je finis vieux, infirme et las;
Les passants vont dire: 'Il est ivre'.
Tant mieux! ils ne me plaindront pas.
J'en vois qui détournent la tête;
D'autres me jettent quelques sous.
Courez vite, allez à la fête:
Vieux vagabond, je puis mourir sans vous.

" Oui, je meurs ici de vieillesse,
Parce qu'on ne meurt pas de faim.
J'espérais voir de ma détresse
L'hôpital adoucir la fin;
Mais tout est plein dans chaque hospice,
Tant le peuple est infortuné.
La rue, hélas! fut ma nourrice:
Vieux vagabond, mourons où je suis né.

" Aux artisans, dans mon jeune âge,
J'ai dit: 'Qu'on m'enseigne un métier'.
'Va, nous n'avons pas trop d'ouvrage,'
Répondaient-ils, 'va mendier'.

Riches, qui me disiez : ' Travaille,'
J'eus bien des os de vos repas ;
J'ai bien dormi sur votre paille :
Vieux vagabond, je ne vous maudis pas.

" J'aurais pu voler, moi, pauvre homme ;
Mais non : mieux vaut tendre la main.
Au plus, j'ai dérobé la pomme
Qui mûrit au bord du chemin.
Vingt fois pourtant on me verrouille
Dans les cachots, de par le roi.
De mon seul bien on me dépouille :
Vieux vagabond, le soleil est à moi.

" Le pauvre a-t-il une patrie ?
Que me font vos vins et vos blés,
Votre gloire et votre industrie,
Et vos orateurs assemblés ?
Dans vos murs ouverts à ses armes
Lorsque l'étranger s'engraissait,
Comme un sot j'ai versé des larmes :
Vieux vagabond, sa main me nourrissait.

" Comme un insecte fait pour nuire,
Hommes, que ne m'écrasiez-vous !
Ah ! plutôt vous deviez m'instruire
A travailler au bien de tous.
Mis à l'abri du vent contraire,
Le ver fût devenu fourmi ;
Je vous aurais chéris en frère :
Vieux vagabond, je meurs votre ennemi."

Pathos in such a song as this enters into poetry. We sympathise with the essential lot of man. Poems of this kind are doubtless rare in Béranger. His commoner style is lighter and more cheerful ; but no poet who has painted so well the light effervescence of light society can, when he likes, paint so well the solid, stubborn forms with which it is encompassed. The genial, firm sense of a large mind sees and comprehends all of human life which lies within

the sphere of sense. He is an epicurean, as all merely sensible men by inevitable consequence are; and as an epicurean, he prefers to deal with the superficial and gay forms of life; but he can deal with others when he chooses to be serious. Indeed, there is no melancholy like the melancholy of the epicurean. He is alive to the fixed conditions of earth, but not to that which is above earth. He muses on the temporary, as such; he admits the skeleton, but not the soul. It is wonderful that Béranger is so cheerful as he is.

We may conclude as we began. In all his works, in lyrics of levity, of politics, of worldly reflection,—Béranger, if he had not a single object, has attained a uniform result. He has given us an idea of the essential French character, such as we fancy it must be, but can never for ourselves hope to see that it is. We understand the nice tact, the quick intelligence, the gay precision; the essence of the drama we know—the spirit of what we have seen. We know his feeling:—

> "J'aime qu'un Russe soit Russe,
> Et qu'un Anglais soit Anglais;
> Si l'on est Prussien en Prusse,
> En France soyons Français".[1]

He has acted accordingly: he has delineated to us the essential Frenchman.

[1] "Le Bon Français."

THE WAVERLEY NOVELS.[1]

(1858.)

It is not commonly on the generation which was contemporary with the production of great works of art that they exercise their most magical influence. Nor is it on the distant people whom we call posterity. Contemporaries bring to new books formed minds and stiffened creeds; posterity, if it regard them at all, looks at them as old subjects, worn-out topics, and hears a disputation on their merits with languid impartiality, like aged judges in a court of appeal. Even standard authors exercise but slender influence on the susceptible minds of a rising generation; they are become "papa's books"; the walls of the library are adorned with their regular volumes; but no hand touches them. Their fame is itself half an obstacle to their popularity; a delicate fancy shrinks from employing so great a celebrity as the companion of an idle hour. The generation which is really most influenced by a work

[1] *Library Edition.* Illustrated by upwards of Two Hundred Engravings on Steel, after Drawings by Turner, Landseer, Wilkie, Stanfield, Roberts, etc., including Portraits of the Historical Personages described in the Novels. 25 vols. demy 8vo.

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of genius is commonly that which is still young when the first controversy respecting its merits arises; with the eagerness of youth they read and re-read; their vanity is not unwilling to adjudicate: in the process their imagination is formed; the creations of the author range themselves in the memory; they become part of the substance of the very mind. The works of Sir Walter Scott can hardly be said to have gone through this exact process. Their immediate popularity was unbounded. No one—a few most captious critics apart—ever questioned their peculiar power. Still they are subject to a transition, which is in principle the same. At the time of their publication mature contemporaries read them with delight. Superficial the reading of grown men in some sort must be; it is only once in a lifetime that we can know the passionate reading of youth; men soon lose its eager learning power. But from peculiarities in their structure, which we shall try to indicate, the novels of Scott suffered less than almost any book of equal excellence from this inevitable superficiality of perusal. Their plain, and, so to say, cheerful merits suit the occupied man of genial middle life. Their appreciation was to an unusual degree coincident with their popularity. The next generation, hearing the praises of their fathers in their earliest reading time, seized with avidity on the volumes; and there is much in very many of them which is admirably fitted for the delight of boyhood. A third generation has now risen into at least the commencement of literary life, which is quite removed from the unbounded enthusiasm with which the Scotch novels were originally received, and does not always share the still more eager partiality of those who, in the opening of their minds, first received the tradition of their excellence. New books have arisen to compete with these; new interests distract us from them. The time, therefore, is not perhaps unfavour-

able for a slight criticism of these celebrated fictions; and their continual republication without any criticism for many years, seems almost to demand it.

There are two kinds of fiction which, though in common literature they may run very much into one another, are yet in reality distinguishable and separate. One of these, which we may call the *ubiquitous*, aims at describing the whole of human life in all its spheres, in all its aspects, with all its varied interests, aims, and objects. It searches through the whole life of man; his practical pursuits, his speculative attempts, his romantic youth, and his domestic age. It gives an entire picture of all these; or if there be any lineaments which it forbears to depict, they are only such as the inevitable repression of a regulated society excludes from the admitted province of literary art. Of this kind are the novels of Cervantes and Le Sage, and, to a certain extent, of Smollett or Fielding. In our own time, Mr. Dickens is an author whom Nature intended to write to a certain extent with this aim. He should have given us *not* disjointed novels, with a vague attempt at a romantic plot, but sketches of diversified scenes, and the obvious life of varied mankind. The literary fates, however, if such beings there are, allotted otherwise. By a very terrible example of the way in which in this world great interests are postponed to little ones, the genius of authors is habitually sacrificed to the tastes of readers. In this age, the great readers of fiction are young people. The "addiction" of these is to romance; and accordingly a kind of novel has become so familiar to us as almost to engross the name, which deals solely with the passion of love; and if it uses other parts of human life for the occasions of its art, it does so only cursorily and occasionally, and with a view of throwing into a stronger or more delicate light those sentimental parts of earthly affairs which are the special

objects of delineation. All prolonged delineation of other parts of human life is considered "dry," stupid, and distracts the mind of the youthful generation from the "fantasies" which peculiarly charm it. Mr. Olmstead has a story of some deputation of the Indians, at which the American orator harangued the barbarian audience about the "great spirit," and "the land of their fathers," in the style of Mr. Cooper's novels; during a moment's pause in the great stream, an old Indian asked the deputation: "Why does your chief speak thus to us? We did not wish great instruction or fine words; we desire brandy and tobacco." No critic in a time of competition will speak uncourteously of any reader of either sex; but it is indisputable that the old kind of novel, full of "great instruction" and varied pictures, does not afford to some young gentlemen and some young ladies either the peculiar stimulus or the peculiar solace which they desire.

The Waverley Novels were published at a time when the causes that thus limit the sphere of fiction were coming into operation, but when they had not yet become so omnipotent as they are now. Accordingly, these novels everywhere bear marks of a state of transition. They are not devoted with anything like the present exclusiveness to the sentimental part of human life. They describe great events, singular characters, strange accidents, strange states of society; they dwell with a peculiar interest—and as if for their own sake—on antiquarian details relating to a past society. Singular customs, social practices, even political institutions which existed once in Scotland, and elsewhere, during the middle ages, are explained with a careful minuteness. At the same time the sentimental element assumes a great deal of prominence. The book is in fact, as well as in theory, a narrative of the feelings and fortunes of the hero and heroine. An attempt more or less successful has been made to insert

an interesting love-story in each novel. Sir Walter was quite aware that the best delineation of the oddest characters, or the most quaint societies, or the strangest incidents, would not in general satisfy his readers. He has invariably attempted an account of youthful, sometimes of decidedly juvenile, feelings and actions. The difference between Sir Walter's novels and the specially romantic fictions of the present day is, that in the former the love-story is always, or nearly always, connected with some great event, or the fortunes of some great historical character, or the peculiar movements and incidents of some strange state of society; and that the author did not suppose or expect that his readers would be so absorbed in the sentimental aspect of human life as to be unable or unwilling to be interested in, or to attend to, any other. There is always a *locus in quo*, if the expression may be pardoned, in the Waverley Novels. The hero and heroine walk among the trees of the forest according to rule, but we are expected to take an interest in the forest as well as in them.

No novel, therefore, of Sir Walter Scott's can be considered to come exactly within the class which we have called the ubiquitous. None of them in any material degree attempts to deal with human affairs in all their spheres—to delineate as a whole the life of man. The canvas has a large background, in some cases too large either for artistic effect or the common reader's interest; but there are always real boundaries—Sir Walter had no *thesis* to maintain. Scarcely any writer will set himself to delineate the whole of human life, unless he has a doctrine concerning human life to put forth and inculcate. The effort is *doctrinaire*. Scott's imagination was strictly conservative. He could understand (with a few exceptions) any considerable movement of human life and action, and could always describe with easy freshness everything which he did understand;

but he was not obliged by stress of fanaticism to maintain a dogma concerning them, or to show their peculiar relation to the general sphere of life. He described vigorously and boldly the peculiar scene and society which in every novel he had selected as the theatre of romantic action. Partly from their fidelity to nature, and partly from a consistency in the artist's mode of representation, these pictures group themselves from the several novels in the imagination, and an habitual reader comes to think of and understand what is meant by "Scott's world"; but the writer had no much distinct object before him. No one novel was designed to be a delineation of the world as Scott viewed it. We have vivid and fragmentary histories; it is for the slow critic of after-times to piece together their teaching.

From this intermediate position of the Waverley Novels, or at any rate in exact accordance with its requirements, is the special characteristic for which they are most remarkable. We may call this in a brief phrase their *romantic sense;* and perhaps we cannot better illustrate it than by a quotation from the novel to which the series owes its most usual name. It occurs in the description of the Court ball which Charles Edward is described as giving at Holyrood House the night before his march southward on his strange adventure. The striking interest of the scene before him, and the peculiar position of his own sentimental career, are described as influencing the mind of the hero.

"Under the influence of these mixed sensations, and cheered at times by a smile of intelligence and approbation from the Prince as he passed the group, Waverley exerted his powers of fancy, animation, and eloquence, and attracted the general admiration of the company. The conversation gradually assumed the line best qualified for the display of his talents and acquisitions. The gaiety of the evening was exalted in character, rather than checked, by the approaching dangers of the morrow. All nerves were strung for the future, and prepared to enjoy the present. This mood is highly favourable for the exercise of the

powers of imagination, for poetry, and for that eloquence which is allied to poetry." [1]

Neither "eloquence" nor "poetry" are the exact words with which it would be appropriate to describe the fresh style of the Waverley Novels; but the imagination of their author was stimulated by a fancied mixture of sentiment and fact, very much as he describes Waverley's to have been by a real experience of the two at once. The second volume of *Waverley* is one of the most striking illustrations of this peculiarity. The character of Charles Edward, his adventurous undertaking, his ancestral rights, the mixed selfishness and enthusiasm of the Highland chiefs, the fidelity of their hereditary followers, their striking and strange array, the contrast with the Baron of Bradwardine and the Lowland gentry; the collision of the motley and half-appointed host with the formed and finished English society, its passage by the Cumberland mountains and the blue lake of Ullswater—are unceasingly and without effort present to the mind of the writer, and incite with their historical interest the susceptibility of his imagination. But at the same time the mental struggle, or rather transition, in the mind of Waverley—for his mind was of the faint order which scarcely struggles—is never for an instant lost sight of. In the very midst of the inroad and the conflict, the acquiescent placidity with which the hero exchanges the service of the imperious for the appreciation of the "nice" heroine, is kept before us, and the imagination of Scott wandered without effort from the great scene of martial affairs to the natural but rather unheroic sentiments of a young gentleman not very difficult to please. There is no trace of effort in the transition, as is so common in the inferior works of later copyists. Many historical novelists,

[1] Chap. xliii.

especially those who with care and pains have "read up" their detail, are often evidently in a strait how to pass from their history to their sentiment. The fancy of Sir Walter could not help connecting the two. If he had given us the English side of the race to Derby, he would have described the Bank of England paying in sixpences, and also the loves of the cashier.

It is not unremarkable in connection with this, the special characteristic of the "Scotch novels," that their author began his literary life by collecting the old ballads of his native country. Ballad poetry is, in comparison at least with many other kinds of poetry, a sensible thing. It describes not only romantic events, but historical ones, incidents in which there is a form and body and consistence —events which have a result. Such a poem as "Chevy Chace," we need not explain, has its prosaic side. The latest historian of Greece[1] has nowhere been more successful than in his attempt to derive from Homer, the greatest of ballad poets, a thorough and consistent account of the political working of the Homeric state of society. The early natural imagination of men seizes firmly on all which interests the minds and hearts of natural men. We find in its delineations the council as well as the marriage; the harsh conflict as well as the deep love-affair. Scott's own poetry is essentially a modernised edition of the traditional poems which his early youth was occupied in collecting. The "Lady of the Lake" is a sort of *boudoir* ballad, yet it contains its element of common-sense and broad delineation. The exact position of Lowlander and Highlander would not be more aptly described in a set treatise than in the well-known lines:—

> "Saxon, from yonder mountain high
> I marked thee send delighted eye

[1] Grote.

Far to the south and east, where lay,
Extended in succession gay,
Deep waving fields and pastures green,
With gentle slopes and groves between:
These fertile plains, that softened vale,
Were once the birthright of the Gael.
The stranger came with iron hand,
And from our fathers reft the land.
Where dwell we now! See, rudely swell
Crag over crag, and fell o'er fell.
Ask we this savage hill we tread,
For fattened steer or household bread;
Ask we for flocks these shingles dry,—
And well the mountain might reply:
To you, as to your sires of yore,
Belong the target and claymore;
I give you shelter in my breast,
Your own good blades must win the rest.
Pent in this fortress of the North,
Think'st thou we will not sally forth
To spoil the spoiler as we may,
And from the robber rend the prey?
Ay, by my soul! While on yon plain
The Saxon rears one shock of grain;
While of ten thousand herds there strays
But one along yon river's maze;
The Gael, of plain and river heir,
Shall with strong hand redeem his share."

We need not search the same poem for specimens of the romantic element, for the whole poem is full of them. The incident in which Ellen discovers who Fitz-James really is, is perhaps excessively romantic. At any rate the lines,—

"To him each lady's look was lent;
On him each courtier's eye was bent;
Midst furs and silks and jewels sheen,
He stood in simple Lincoln green,
The centre of the glittering ring,
And Snowdoun's knight is Scotland's king,"—

may be cited as very sufficient example of the sort of sentimental incident which is separable from extreme feeling. When Scott, according to his own half-jesting but half-serious expression, was "beaten out of poetry" by Byron, he began to express in more pliable prose the same combination which his verse had been used to convey. As might have been expected, the sense became in the novels more free, vigorous, and flowing, because it is less cramped by the vehicle in which it is conveyed. The range of character which can be adequately delineated in narrative verse is much narrower than that which can be described in the combination of narrative with dramatic prose; and perhaps even the sentiment of the novels is manlier and freer; a delicate unreality hovers over the "Lady of the Lake".

The sensible element, if we may so express it, of the Waverley Novels appears in various forms. One of the most striking is in the delineation of great political events and influential political institutions. We are not by any means about to contend that Scott is to be taken as an infallible or an impartial authority for the parts of history which he delineates. On the contrary, we believe all the world now agrees that there are many deductions to be made from, many exceptions to be taken to, the accuracy of his delineations. Still, whatever period or incident we take, we shall always find in the error a great, in one or two cases perhaps an extreme, mixture of the mental element which we term common-sense. The strongest *un*sensible feeling in Scott was perhaps his Jacobitism, which crept out even in small incidents and recurring prejudice throughout the whole of his active career, and was, so to say, the emotional aspect of his habitual Toryism. Yet no one can have given a more sensible delineation, we might say a more statesmanlike analysis, of the various causes which led to the momentary success, and to the speedy ruin, of the enterprise of Charles Edward.[1] Mr. Lockhart says,

[1] In *Waverley*.

that notwithstanding Scott's imaginative readiness to exalt Scotland at the expense of England, no man would have been more willing to join in emphatic opposition to an anti-English party, if any such had presented itself with a practical object. Similarly his Jacobitism, though not without moments of real influence, passed away when his mind was directed to broad masses of fact, and general conclusions of political reasoning. A similar observation may be made as to Scott's Toryism; although it is certain that there was an enthusiastic, and, in the malicious sense, poetical element in Scott's Toryism, yet quite as indisputably it partook largely of two other elements, which are in common repute prosaic. He shared abundantly in the love of administration and organisation, common to all men of great active powers. He liked to contemplate method at work and order in action. Everybody hates to hear that the Duke of Wellington asked "how the king's government was to be carried on". No amount of warning wisdom will bear so fearful a repetition. Still he *did* say it, and Scott had a sympathising foresight of the oracle before it was spoken. One element of his conservatism is his sympathy with the administrative arrangement, which is confused by the objections of a Whiggish opposition and is liable to be altogether destroyed by uprisings of the populace. His biographer, while pointing out the strong contrast between Scott and the argumentative and parliamentary statesmen of his age, avows his opinion that in other times, and with sufficient opportunities, Scott's ability in managing men would have enabled him to "play the part of Cecil or of Gondomar".[1] We may see how much a suppressed enthusiasm for such abilities breaks out, not only in the description of hereditary monarchs, where the sentiment

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vol. v., chap. viii., *in re* Scott's management of the Highland pageant on George IV.'s visit to Scotland. (Forrest Morgan.)

might be ascribed to a different origin, but also in the delineation of upstart rulers, who could have no hereditary sanctity in the eyes of any Tory. Roland Græme, in *The Abbot*, is well described as losing in the presence of the Regent Murray the natural impertinence of his disposition. "He might have braved with indifference the presence of an earl merely distinguished by his belt and coronet; but he felt overawed in that of the soldier and statesman, the wielder of a nation's power, and the leader of her armies."[1] It is easy to perceive that the author shares the feeling of his hero by the evident pleasure with which he dwells on the regent's demeanour: "He then turned slowly round toward Roland Græme, and the marks of gaiety, real or assumed, disappeared from his countenance as completely as the passing bubbles leave the dark mirror of a still profound lake into which the traveller has cast a stone; in the course of a minute his noble features had assumed their natural expression of melancholy gravity,"[2] etc. In real life, Scott used to say, that he never remembered feeling abashed in any one's presence except the Duke of Wellington's. Like that of the hero of his novel, his imagination was very susceptible to the influence of great achievements and prolonged success in wide-spreading affairs.

The view which Scott seems to have taken of democracy indicates exactly the same sort of application of a plain sense to the visible parts of the subject. His imagination was singularly penetrated with the strange varieties and motley composition of human life. The extraordinary multitude and striking contrast of the characters in his novels show this at once. And even more strikingly is the same habit of mind indicated "by a tendency never to omit an opportunity of describing those varied crowds and assemblages" which concentrate for a moment into a unity

[1] Chap. xviii. [2] *Ibid*

the scattered and unlike varieties of mankind. Thus, but a page or two before the passage which we alluded to in *The Abbot*, we find the following :—

"It was indeed no common sight to Roland, the vestibule of a palace, traversed by its various groups,—some radiant with gaiety—some pensive, and apparently weighed down by affairs concerning the State, or concerning themselves. Here the hoary statesman, with his cautious yet commanding look, his furred cloak and sable pantoufles; there the soldier in buff and steel, his long sword jarring against the pavement, and his whiskered upper lip and frowning brow looking an habitual defiance of danger, which perhaps was not always made good; there again passed my lord's serving-man, high of heart and bloody of hand, humble to his master and his master's equals, insolent to all others. To these might be added the poor suitor, with his anxious look and depressed mien—the officer, full of his brief authority, elbowing his betters, and possibly his benefactors, out of the road—the proud priest, who sought a better benefice—the proud baron, who sought a grant of Church lands—the robber chief, who came to solicit a pardon for the injuries he had inflicted on his neighbours—the plundered franklin, who came to seek vengeance for that which he had himself received. Besides, there was the mustering and disposition of guards and soldiers—the despatching of messengers, and the receiving them—the trampling and neighing of horses without the gate—the flashing of arms, and rustling of plumes, and jingling of spurs within it. In short, it was that gay and splendid confusion, in which the eye of youth sees all that is brave and brilliant, and that of experience much that is doubtful, deceitful, false, and hollow—hopes that will never be gratified—promises which will never be fulfilled—pride in the disguise of humility—and insolence in that of frank and generous bounty."[1]

As in the imagination of Shakespeare, so in that of Scott, the principal form and object were the structure—that is a hard word—the undulation and diversified composition of human society; the picture of this stood in the centre, and everything else was accessory and secondary to it. The old "rows of books," in which Scott so peculiarly delighted, were made to contribute their element to this varied imagination of humanity. From old family histories, odd memoirs, old law-trials, his fancy elicited new traits to add to the motley assem-

[1] Chap. xviii., 3rd paragraph.

blage. His objection to democracy—an objection of which we can only appreciate the emphatic force, when we remember that his youth was contemporary with the first French Revolution, and the controversy as to the uniform and stereotyped rights of man—was, that it would sweep away this entire picture, level prince and peasant in a common *égalité*,—substitute a scientific rigidity for the irregular and picturesque growth of centuries,—replace an abounding and genial life by a symmetrical but lifeless mechanism. All the descriptions of society in the novels,—whether of feudal society, of modern Scotch society or of English society,—are largely coloured by this feeling. It peeps out everywhere, and liberal critics have endeavoured to show that it was a narrow Toryism; but in reality, it is a subtle compound of the natural instinct of the artist with the plain sagacity of the man of the world.

It would be tedious to show how clearly the same sagacity appears in his delineation of the various great events and movements in society which are described in the Scotch novels. There is scarcely one of them which does not bear it on its surface. Objections may, as we shall show, be urged against the delineation which Scott has given of the Puritan resistance and rebellions, yet scarcely any one will say there is not a worldly sense in it. On the contrary, the very objection is, that it is too worldly, and far too exclusively sensible.

The same thoroughly well-grounded sagacity and comprehensive appreciation of human life is shown in the treatment of what we may call *anomalous* characters. In general, monstrosity is no topic for art. Every one has known in real life characters which if, apart from much experience, he had found described in books, he would have thought unnatural and impossible. Scott, however, abounds in such characters. Meg Merrilies, Edie Ochiltree, Radcliffe,[1] are

[1] In *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary* and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*.

more or less of that description. That of Meg Merrilies especially is as distorted and eccentric as anything can be. Her appearance is described as making Mannering "start"; and well it might.

"She was full six feet high, wore a man's greatcoat over the rest of her dress, had in her hand a goodly sloethorn cudgel, and in all points of equipment except her petticoats seemed rather masculine than feminine. Her dark elf-locks shot out like the snakes of the gorgon between an old-fashioned bonnet called a bongrace, heightening the singular effect of her strong and weather-beaten features, which they partly shadowed, while her eye had a wild roll that indicated something of insanity." [1]

Her career in the tale corresponds with the strangeness of her exterior. "Harlot, thief, witch, and gipsy," as she describes herself, the hero is preserved by her virtues; half-crazed as she is described to be, he owes his safety on more than one occasion to her skill in stratagem, and ability in managing those with whom she is connected, and who are most likely to be familiar with her weakness and to detect her craft. Yet on hardly any occasion is the natural reader conscious of this strangeness. Something is of course attributable to the skill of the artist; for no other power of mind could produce the effect, unless it were aided by the unconscious tact of detailed expression. But the fundamental explanation of this remarkable success is the distinctness with which Scott saw how such a character as Meg Merrilies arose and was produced out of the peculiar circumstances of gipsy life in the localities in which he has placed his scene. He has exhibited this to his readers not by lengthy or elaborate description, but by chosen incidents, short comments, and touches of which he scarcely foresaw the effect. This is the only way in which the fundamental objection to making eccentricity the subject of artistic treatment can be obviated. Monstrosity ceases to be such when we discern

[1] *Guy Mannering*, chap. iii.

the laws of Nature which evolve it: when a real science explains its phenomena, we find that it is in strict accordance with what we call the natural type, but that some rare adjunct or uncommon casualty has interfered and distorted a nature which is really the same, into a phenomenon which is altogether different. Just so with eccentricity in human character; it becomes a topic of literary art only when its identity with the ordinary principles of human nature is exhibited in the midst of, and as it were by means of, the superficial unlikeness. Such a skill, however, requires an easy careless familiarity with usual human life and common human conduct. A writer must have a sympathy with health before he can show us how, and where, and to what extent, that which is unhealthy deviates from it; and it is this consistent acquaintance with regular life which makes the irregular characters of Scott so happy a contrast to the uneasy distortions of less sagacious novelists.

A good deal of the same criticism may be applied to the delineation which Scott has given us of the *poor*. In truth, poverty is an anomaly to rich people. It is very difficult to make out why people who want dinner do not ring the bell. One half of the world, according to the saying, do not know how the other half live. Accordingly, nothing is so rare in fiction as a good delineation of the poor. Though perpetually with us in reality, we rarely meet them in our reading. The requirements of the case present an unusual difficulty to artistic delineation. A good deal of the character of the poor is an unfit topic for continuous art, and yet we wish to have in our books a life-like exhibition of the whole of that character. Mean manners and mean vices are unfit for prolonged delineation; the every-day pressure of narrow necessities is too petty a pain and too anxious a reality to be dwelt upon. We can bear the mere description of the *Parish Register*—

> "But this poor farce has neither truth nor art
> To please the fancy or to touch the heart.
> Dark but not awful, dismal but yet mean,
> With anxious bustle moves the cumbrous scene;
> Presents no objects tender or profound,
> But spreads its cold unmeaning gloom around;"—

but who could bear to have a long narrative of fortunes "dismal but yet mean," with characters "dark but not awful," and no objects "tender or profound"? Mr. Dickens has in various parts of his writings been led by a sort of pre-Raphaelite *cultus* of reality into an error of this species. His poor people have taken to their poverty very thoroughly; they are poor talkers and poor livers, and in all ways poor people to read about. A whole array of writers have fallen into an opposite mistake. Wishing to preserve their delineations clear from the defects of meanness and vulgarity, they have attributed to the poor a fancied happiness and Arcadian simplicity. The conventional shepherd of ancient times was scarcely displeasing: that which is by everything except express avowal removed from the sphere of reality does not annoy us by its deviations from reality; but the fictitious poor of sentimental novelists are brought almost into contact with real life, half claim to be copies of what actually exists at our very doors, are introduced in close proximity to characters moving in a higher rank, over whom no such ideal charm is diffused, and who are painted with as much truth as the writer's ability enables him to give. Accordingly, the contrast is evident and displeasing: the harsh outlines of poverty will not bear the artificial rose-tint; they are seen through it, like high cheek-bones through the delicate colours of artificial youth; we turn away with some disgust from the false elegance and undeceiving art; we prefer the rough poor of nature to the petted poor of the refining describer. Scott has most felicitously avoided both

these errors. His poor people are never coarse and never vulgar; their lineaments have the rude traits which a life of conflict will inevitably leave on the minds and manners of those who are to lead it; their notions have the narrowness which is inseparable from a contracted experience; their knowledge is not more extended than their restricted means of attaining it would render possible. Almost alone among novelists Scott has given a thorough, minute, life-like description of poor persons, which is at the same time genial and pleasing. The reason seems to be, that the firm sagacity of his genius comprehended the industrial aspect of poor people's life thoroughly and comprehensively, his experience brought it before him easily and naturally, and his artist's mind and genial disposition enabled him to dwell on those features which would be most pleasing to the world in general. In fact, his own mind of itself and by its own nature dwelt on those very peculiarities. He could not remove his firm and instructed genius into the domain of Arcadian unreality, but he was equally unable to dwell principally, peculiarly, or consecutively, on those petty, vulgar, mean details in which such a writer as Crabbe lives and breathes. Hazlitt said that Crabbe described a poor man's cottage like a man who came to distrain for rent; he catalogued every trivial piece of furniture, defects and cracks and all. Scott describes it as a cheerful but most sensible landlord would describe a cottage on his property: he has a pleasure in it. No detail, or few details, in the life of the inmates escape his experienced and interested eye; but he dwells on those which do not displease him. He sympathises with their rough industry and plain joys and sorrows. He does not fatigue himself or excite their wondering smile by theoretical plans of impossible relief. He makes the best of the life which is given, and by a sanguine sympathy makes it still better. A hard life many characters in Scott seem to

lead; but he appreciates, and makes his reader appreciate, the full value of natural feelings, plain thoughts, and applied sagacity.

His ideas of political economy are equally characteristic of his strong sense and genial mind. He was always sneering at Adam Smith, and telling many legends of that philosopher's absence of mind and inaptitude for the ordinary conduct of life. A contact with the Edinburgh logicians had, doubtless, not augmented his faith in the formal deductions of abstract economy; nevertheless, with the facts before him, he could give a very plain and satisfactory exposition of the genial consequences of old abuses, the distinct necessity for stern reform, and the delicate humanity requisite for introducing that reform temperately and with feeling:—

"Even so the Laird of Ellangowan ruthlessly commenced his magisterial reform, at the expense of various established and superannuated pickers and stealers, who had been his neighbours for half a century. He wrought his miracles like a second Duke Humphrey; and by the influence of the beadle's rod, caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, and the palsied to labour. He detected poachers, black-fishers, orchard-breakers, and pigeon-shooters; had the applause of the bench for his reward, and the public credit of an active magistrate.

"All this good had its rateable proportion of evil. Even an admitted nuisance, of ancient standing, should not be abated without some caution. The zeal of our worthy friend now involved in great distress sundry personages whose idle and mendicant habits his own *lâchesse* had contributed to foster, until these habits had become irreclaimable, or whose real incapacity for exertion rendered them fit objects, in their own phrase, for the charity of all well-disposed Christians. The 'long-remembered beggar,' who for twenty years had made his regular rounds within the neighbourhood, received rather as an humble friend than as an object of charity, was sent to the neighbouring workhouse. The decrepit dame, who travelled round the parish upon a hand-barrow, circulating from house to house like a bad shilling, which every one is in haste to pass to his neighbour; she who used to call for her bearers as loud, or louder, than a traveller demands post-horses, even she shared the same disastrous fate. The 'daft Jock,' who, half knave, half idiot, had been the sport of each

succeeding race of village children for a good part of a century, was remitted to the county bridewell, where, secluded from free air and sunshine, the only advantages he was capable of enjoying, he pined and died in the course of six months. The old sailor, who had so long rejoiced the smoky rafters of every kitchen in the country, by singing 'Captain Ward' and 'Bold Admiral Benbow,' was banished from the county for no better reason than that he was supposed to speak with a strong Irish accent. Even the annual rounds of the pedlar were abolished by the Justice, in his hasty zeal for the administration of rural police.

"These things did not pass without notice and censure. We are not made of wood or stone, and the things which connect themselves with our hearts and habits cannot, like bark or lichen, be rent away without our missing them. The farmer's dame lacked her usual share of intelligence, perhaps also the self-applause which she had felt while distributing the *awmous* (alms), in shape of a *gowpen* (handful) of oatmeal, to the mendicant who brought the news. The cottage felt inconvenience from interruption of the petty trade carried on by the itinerant dealers. The children lacked their supply of sugar-plums and toys; the young women wanted pins, ribbons, combs, and ballads; and the old could no longer barter their eggs for salt, snuff, and tobacco. All these circumstances brought the busy Laird of Ellangowan into discredit, which was the more general on account of his former popularity. Even his lineage was brought up in judgment against him. They thought 'naething of what the like of Greenside, or Burnville, or Viewforth, might do, that were strangers in the country; but Ellangowan! that had been a name amang them since the mirk Monanday, and lang before—*him* to be grinding the puir at that rate!—They ca'd his grandfather the Wicked Laird; but, though he was whiles fractious aneuch, when he got into roving company, and had ta'en the drap drink, he would have scorned to gang on at this gate. Na, na, the muckle chumley in the Auld Place reeked like a killogie in his time, and there were as mony puir folk riving at the banes in the court and about the door, as there were gentles in the ha'. And the leddy, on ilka Christmas night as it came round, gae twelve siller pennies to ilka puir body about, in honour of the twelve apostles like. They were fond to ca' it papistrie; but I think our great folk might take a lesson frae the papists whiles. They gie another sort o' help to puir folk than just dinging down a saxpence in the brod on the Sabbath, and kilting, and scourging, and drumming them a' the sax days o' the week besides.'"[1]

[1] *Guy Mannering*, chap. vi.

Many other indications of the same healthy and natural sense, which gives so much of their characteristic charm to the Scotch novels, might be pointed out, if it were necessary to weary our readers by dwelling longer on a point we have already laboured so much. One more, however, demands notice because of its importance, and perhaps also because, from its somewhat less obvious character, it might otherwise escape without notice. There has been frequent controversy as to the penal code, if we may so call it, of fiction; that is, as to the apportionment of reward and punishment respectively to the good and evil personages therein delineated; and the practice of authors has been as various as the legislation of critics. One school abandons all thought on the matter, and declares that in the real life we see around us, good people often fail, and wicked people continually prosper; and would deduce the precept, that it is unwise in an art which should "hold the mirror up to nature," [1] not to copy the uncertain and irregular distribution of its sanctions. Another school, with an exactness which savours at times of pedantry, apportions the success and the failure, the pain and the pleasure of fictitious life, to the moral qualities of those who are living in it—does not think at all, or but little, of any other quality in those characters, and does not at all care whether the penalty and reward are evolved in natural sequence from the circumstances and characters of the tale, or are owing to some monstrous accident far removed from all relation of cause or consequence to those facts and people. Both these classes of writers produce works which jar on the natural sense of common readers, and are at issue with the analytic criticism of the best critics. One school leaves an impression of an uncared-for world, in which there is no right and no wrong; the other, of a sort of Governesses' Institution

[1] "Hamlet," iii. 2.

of a world, where all praise and all blame, all good and all pain, are made to turn on special graces and petty offences, pesteringly spoken of and teasingly watched for. The manner of Scott is thoroughly different; you can scarcely lay down any novel of his without a strong feeling that the world in which the fiction has been laid, and in which your imagination has been moving, is one subject to laws of retribution which, though not apparent on a superficial glance, are yet in steady and consistent operation, and will be quite sure to work their due effect, if time is only given to them. Sagacious men know that this is in its best aspect the condition of life. Certain of the ungodly may, notwithstanding the Psalmist, flourish even through life like a green bay-tree; for providence, in external appearance (far differently from the real truth of things, as we may one day see it), works by a scheme of averages. Most people who ought to succeed, do succeed; most people who do fail, ought to fail. But there is no exact adjustment of "mark" to merit; the competitive examination system appears to have an origin more recent than the creation of the world;—"on the whole," "speaking generally," "looking at life as a whole," are the words in which we must describe the providential adjustment of visible good and evil to visible goodness and badness. And when we look more closely, we see that these general results are the consequences of certain principles which work half unseen, and which are effectual in the main, though thwarted here and there. It is this comprehensive though inexact distribution of good and evil, which is suited to the novelist, and it is exactly this which Scott instinctively adopted. Taking a firm and genial view of the common facts of life,—seeing it as an experienced observer and tried man of action,—he could not help giving the representation of it which is insensibly borne in on the minds of such persons. He delineates it as a world moving

according to laws which are always producing their effect, never *have* produced it; sometimes fall short a little; are always nearly successful. Good sense produces its effect, as well as good intention; ability is valuable as well as virtue. It is this peculiarity which gives to his works, more than anything else, the lifelikeness which distinguishes them; the average of the copy is struck on the same scale as that of reality; an unexplained, uncommented-on adjustment works in the one, just as a hidden, imperceptible principle of apportionment operates in the other.

The romantic susceptibility of Scott's imagination is as obvious in his novels as his matter-of-fact sagacity. We can find much of it in the place in which we should naturally look first for it,—his treatment of his heroines. We are no indiscriminate admirers of these young ladies, and shall shortly try to show how much they are inferior as imaginative creations to similar creations of the very highest artists. But the mode in which the writer speaks of them everywhere indicates an imagination continually under the illusion which we term romance. A gentle tone of manly admiration pervades the whole delineation of their words and actions. If we look carefully at the narratives of some remarkable female novelists—it would be invidious to give the instances by name—we shall be struck at once with the absence of this; they do not half like their heroines. It would be satirical to say that they were jealous of them; but it is certain that they analyse the mode in which their charms produce their effects, and the *minutiæ* of their operation, much in the same way in which a slightly jealous lady examines the claims of the heroines of society. The same writers have invented the atrocious species of plain heroines. Possibly none of the frauds which are now so much the topic of common remark are so irritating, as that to which the purchaser of a novel is a victim on finding

that he has only to peruse a narrative of the conduct and sentiments of an ugly lady. "Two-and-sixpence to know the heart which has high cheek-bones!" Was there ever such an imposition? Scott would have recoiled from such a conception. Even Jeanie Deans,[1] though no heroine, like Flora Macivor,[2] is described as "comely," and capable of looking almost pretty when required, and she has a compensating set-off in her sister, who is beautiful as well as unwise. Speaking generally, as is the necessity of criticism, Scott makes his heroines, at least by profession, attractive, and dwells on their attractiveness, though not with the wild ecstasy of insane youth, yet with the tempered and mellow admiration common to genial men of this world. Perhaps at times we are rather displeased at his explicitness, and disposed to hang back and carp at the admirable qualities displayed to us. But this is only a stronger evidence of the peculiarity which we speak of,—of the unconscious sentiments inseparable from Scott's imagination.

The same romantic tinge undeniably shows itself in Scott's pictures of the past. Many exceptions have been taken to the detail of mediæval life as it is described to us in *Ivanhoe;* but one merit will always remain to it, and will be enough to secure to it immense popularity. It describes the middle ages as we should have wished them to have been. We do not mean that the delineation satisfies those accomplished admirers of the old Church system who fancy that they have found among the prelates and barons of the fourteenth century a close approximation to the theocracy which they would recommend for our adoption. On the contrary, the theological merits of the middle ages are not prominent in Scott's delineation. "Dogma" was not in his way: a cheerful man of the world is not anxious for a precise

[1] In *The Heart of Mid-Lothian.* [2] In *Waverley.*

definition of peculiar doctrines. The charm of *Ivanhoe* is addressed to a simpler sort of imagination, to that kind of boyish fancy which idolises mediæval society as the "fighting time". Every boy has heard of tournaments, and has a firm persuasion that in an age of tournaments life was thoroughly well understood. A martial society, where men fought hand to hand on good horses with large lances, in peace for pleasure, and in war for business, seems the very ideal of perfection to a bold and simply fanciful boy. *Ivanhoe* spreads before him the full landscape of such a realm, with Richard Cœur-de-Lion, a black horse, and the passage of arms at Ashby. Of course he admires it, and thinks there was never such a writer, and will never more be such a world. And a mature critic will share his admiration, at least to the extent of admitting that nowhere else have the elements of a martial romance been so gorgeously accumulated without becoming oppressive; their fanciful charm been so powerfully delineated, and yet so constantly relieved by touches of vigorous sagacity. One single fact shows how great the romantic illusion is. The pressure of painful necessity is scarcely so great in this novel, as in novels of the same writer in which the scene is laid in modern times. Much may be said in favour of the mediæval system as contradistinguished from existing society; much has been said. But no one can maintain that general comfort was as much diffused as it is now. A certain ease pervades the structure of later society. Our houses may not last so long, are not so picturesque, will leave no such ruins behind them; but they are warmed with hot water, have no draughts, and contain sofas instead of rushes. A slight daily unconscious luxury is hardly ever wanting to the dwellers in civilisation; like the gentle air of a genial climate, it is a perpetual minute enjoyment. The absence of this marks a rude barbaric time. We may avail ourselves of

rough pleasures, stirring amusements, exciting actions, strange rumours; but life is hard and harsh. The cold air of the keen North may brace and invigorate, but it cannot soothe us. All sensible people know that the middle ages must have been very uncomfortable; there was a difficulty about "good food";—almost insuperable obstacles to the cultivation of nice detail and small enjoyment. No one knew the abstract facts on which this conclusion rests better than Scott; but his delineation gives no general idea of the result. A thoughtless reader rises with the impression that the middle ages had the same elements of happiness which we have at present, and that they had fighting besides. We do not assert that this tenet is explicitly taught; on the contrary, many facts are explained, and many customs elucidated from which a discriminating and deducing reader would infer the meanness of poverty and the harshness of barbarism. But these less imposing traits escape the rapid, and still more the boyish reader. His general impression is one of romance; and though, when roused, Scott was quite able to take a distinct view of the opposing facts, he liked his own mind to rest for the most part in the same pleasing illusion.

The same sort of historical romance is shown likewise in Scott's picture of remarkable historical characters. His Richard I. is the traditional Richard, with traits heightened and ennobled in perfect conformity to the spirit of tradition. Some illustration of the same quality might be drawn from his delineations of the Puritan rebellions and the Cavalier enthusiasm. We might show that he ever dwells on the traits and incidents most attractive to a genial and spirited imagination. But the most remarkable instance of the power which romantic illusion exercised over him, is his delineation of Mary Queen of Scots. He refused at one time of his life to write a biography of that princess

"because his opinion was contrary to his feeling". He evidently considered her guilt to be clearly established, and thought, with a distinguished lawyer, that he should "direct a jury to find her guilty"; but his fancy, like that of most of his countrymen, took a peculiar and special interest in the beautiful lady who, at any rate, had suffered so much and so fatally at the hands of a queen of England. He could not bring himself to dwell with nice accuracy on the evidence which substantiates her criminality, or on the still clearer indications of that unsound and over-crafty judgment, which was the fatal inheritance of the Stuart family, and which, in spite of advantages that scarcely any other family in the world has enjoyed, has made their name a historical by-word for misfortune. The picture in *The Abbot*, one of the best historical pictures which Scott has given us, is principally the picture of the queen as the fond tradition of his countrymen exhibited her. Her entire innocence, it is true, is never alleged: but the enthusiasm of her followers is dwelt on with approving sympathy; their confidence is set forth at large; her influence over them is skilfully delineated; the fascination of charms chastened by misfortune is delicately indicated. We see a complete picture of the beautiful queen, of the suffering and sorrowful, but yet not insensible woman. Scott could not, however, as a close study will show us, quite conceal the unfavourable nature of his fundamental opinion. In one remarkable passage the struggle of the judgment is even conspicuous, and in others the sagacity of the practised lawyer,—the "thread of the attorney," as he used to call it, in his nature,—qualifies and modifies the sentiment hereditary in his countrymen, and congenial to himself.

This romantic imagination is a habit of power (as we may choose to call it) of mind which is almost essential to the highest success in the historical novel. The aim, at any

rate the effect, of this class of works seems to be to deepen and confirm the received view of historical personages. A great and acute writer may, from an accurate study of original documents, discover that those impressions are erroneous, and by a process of elaborate argument substitute others which he deems more accurate. But this can only be effected by writing a regular history. The essence of the achievement is the proof. If Mr. Froude had put forward his view of Henry V.'s character in a professed novel, he would have been laughed at. It is only by a rigid adherence to attested facts and authentic documents, that a view so original could obtain even a hearing. We start back with a little anger from a representation which is avowedly imaginative, and which contradicts our impressions. We do not like to have our opinions disturbed by reasoning; but it is impertinent to attempt to disturb them by fancies. A writer of the historical novel is bound by the popular conception of his subject; and commonly it will be found that this popular impression is to some extent a romantic one. An element of exaggeration clings to the popular judgment: great vices are made greater, great virtues greater also; interesting incidents are made more interesting, soft legends more soft. The novelist who disregards this tendency will do so at the peril of his popularity. His business is to make attraction more attractive, and not to impair the pleasant pictures of ready-made romance by an attempt at grim reality.

We may therefore sum up the indications of this characteristic excellence of Scott's novels by saying, that more than any novelist he has given us fresh pictures of practical human society, with its cares and troubles, its excitements and its pleasures; that he has delineated more distinctly than any one else the framework in which this society inheres, and by the boundaries of which it is shaped and limited; that he

has made more clear the way in which strange and eccentric characters grow out of that ordinary and usual system of life; that he has extended his view over several periods of society, and given an animated description of the external appearance of each, and a firm representation of its social institutions; that he has shown very graphically what we may call the worldly laws of moral government; and that over all these he has spread the glow of sentiment natural to a manly mind, and an atmosphere of generosity congenial to a cheerful one. It is from the collective effect of these causes, and from the union of sense and sentiment which is the principle of them all, that Scott derives the peculiar healthiness which distinguishes him. There are no such books as his for the sick-room, or for freshening the painful intervals of a morbid mind. Mere sense is dull, mere sentiment unsubstantial; a sensation of genial healthiness is only given by what combines the solidity of the one and the brightening charm of the other.

Some guide to Scott's defects, or to the limitations of his genius, if we would employ a less ungenial and perhaps more correct expression, is to be discovered, as usual, from the consideration of his characteristic excellence. As it is his merit to give bold and animated pictures of this world, it is his defect to give but insufficient representations of qualities which this world does not exceedingly prize,—of such as do not thrust themselves very forward in it,—of such as are in some sense above it. We may illustrate this in several ways.

One of the parts of human nature which are systematically omitted in Scott, is the searching and abstract intellect. This did not lie in his way. No man had a stronger sagacity, better adapted for the guidance of common men, and the conduct of common transactions. Few could hope to form a more correct opinion on things and subjects which were brought

before him in actual life; no man had a more useful intellect. But on the other hand, as will be generally observed to be the case, no one was less inclined to that probing and seeking and anxious inquiry into things in general which is the necessity of some minds, and a sort of intellectual famine in their nature. He had no call to investigate the theory of the universe, and he would not have been able to comprehend those who did. Such a mind as Shelley's would have been entirely removed from his comprehension. He had no call to mix "awful talk and asking looks" [1] with his love of the visible scene. He could not have addressed the universe:—

> "I have watched
> Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps;
> And my heart ever gazes on the depth
> Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed
> In charnels and on coffins, where black death
> Keeps record of the trophies won from thee,
> Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
> Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,
> Thy messenger, to render up the tale
> Of what we are." [2]

Such thoughts would have been to him "thinking without an object," "abstracted speculations," "cobwebs of the unintelligible brain". Above all minds, his had the Baconian propensity to work upon "stuff". At first sight, it would not seem that this was a defect likely to be very hurtful to the works of a novelist. The labours of the searching and introspective intellect, however needful, absorbing, and in some degree delicious, to the seeker himself, are not in general very delightful to those who are not seeking. Genial men in middle life are commonly intolerant of that philosophising which their prototype, in old times, classed side by side with the lisping of youth. The theo-

[1] Shelley, "Alastor". [2] *Ibid*

logical novel, which was a few years ago so popular, and which is likely to have a recurring influence in times when men's belief is unsettled, and persons who cannot or will not read large treatises have thoughts in their minds and inquiries in their hearts, suggests to those who are accustomed to it the absence elsewhere of what is necessarily one of its most distinctive and prominent subjects. The desire to attain a belief, which has become one of the most familiar sentiments of heroes and heroines, would have seemed utterly incongruous to the plain sagacity of Scott, and also to his old-fashioned art. Creeds are *data* in his novels; people have different creeds, but each keeps his own. Some persons will think that this is not altogether amiss; nor do we particularly wish to take up the defence of the dogmatic novel. Nevertheless, it will strike those who are accustomed to the youthful generation of a cultivated time, that the passion of intellectual inquiry is one of the strongest impulses in many of them, and one of those which give the predominant colouring to the conversation and exterior mind of many more. And a novelist will not exercise the most potent influence over those subject to that passion, if he entirely omit the delineation of it. Scott's works have only one merit in this relation: they are an excellent rest to those who have felt this passion, and have had something too much of it.

The same indisposition to the abstract exercises of the intellect shows itself in the reflective portions of Scott's novels, and perhaps contributes to their popularity with that immense majority of the world who strongly share in that same indisposition: it prevents, however, their having the most powerful intellectual influence on those who have at any time of their lives voluntarily submitted themselves to this acute and refining discipline. The reflections of a practised thinker have a peculiar charm, like the last touches

of the accomplished artist. The cunning exactitude of the professional hand leaves a trace in the very language. A nice discrimination of thought makes men solicitous of the most apt expressions to diffuse their thoughts. Both words and meaning gain a metallic brilliancy, like the glittering precision of the pure Attic air. Scott's is a healthy and genial world of reflection, but it wants the charm of delicate exactitude.

The same limitation of Scott's genius shows itself in a very different portion of art—in his delineation of his heroines. The same blunt sagacity of imagination which fitted him to excel in the rough description of obvious life, rather unfitted him for delineating the less substantial essence of the female character. The nice *minutiæ* of society, by means of which female novelists have been so successful in delineating their own sex, were rather too small for his robust and powerful mind. Perhaps, too, a certain unworldliness of *imagination* is necessary to enable men to comprehend or delineate that essence: unworldliness of *life* is no doubt not requisite; rather, perhaps, worldliness is necessary to the acquisition of a sufficient experience. But an absorption in the practical world does not seem favourable to a comprehension of anything which does not precisely belong to it. Its interests are too engrossing; its excitements too keen; it modifies the fancy, and in the change unfits it for everything else. Something, too, in Scott's character and history made it more difficult for him to give a representation of women than of men. Goethe used to say, that his idea of woman was not drawn from his experience, but that it came to him before experience, and that he explained his experience by a reference to it.[1] And though this is a German, and not very happy, form of expression, yet it appears to indicate a very im-

[1] Conversations with Eckermann and Soret, 22nd Oct., 1828.

portant distinction. Some efforts of the imagination are made so early in life, just as it were at the dawn of the conscious faculties, that we are never able to fancy ourselves as destitute of them. They are part of the mental constitution with which, so to speak, we awoke to existence. These are always far more firm, vivid, and definite, than any other images of our fancy; and we apply them, half unconsciously, to any facts and sentiments and actions which may occur to us later in life, whether arising from within or thrust upon us from the outward world. Goethe doubtless meant that the idea of the female character was to him one of these first elements of imagination; not a thing puzzled out, or which he remembered having conceived, but a part of the primitive conceptions which, being coeval with his memory, seemed inseparable from his consciousness. The descriptions of women likely to be given by this sort of imagination will probably be the best descriptions. A mind which would arrive at this idea of the female character by this process, and so early, would be one obviously of more than usual susceptibility. The early imagination does not commonly take this direction; it thinks most of horses and lances, tournaments and knights; only a mind with an unusual and instinctive tendency to this kind of thought, would be borne thither so early or so effectually. And even independently of this probable peculiarity of the individual, the primitive imagination in general is likely to be the most accurate which men can form; not, of course, of the external manifestations and detailed manners, but of the inner sentiment and characteristic feeling of women. The early imagination conceives what it does conceive very justly; fresh from the facts, stirred by the new aspect of things, undimmed by the daily passage of constantly forgotten images, not misled by the irregular analogies of a dislocated life,—the early mind

sees what it does see with a spirit and an intentness never given to it again. A mind like Goethe's, of very strong imagination, aroused at the earliest age,—not of course by passions, but by an unusual strength in that undefined longing which is the prelude to our passions,—will form the best idea of the inmost female nature which masculine nature can form. The difference is evident between the characters of women formed by Goethe's imagination or Shakespeare's, and those formed by such an imagination as that of Scott. The latter seem so external. We have traits, features, manners; we know the heroine as she appeared in the street; in some degree we know how she talked, but we never know how she felt—least of all what she was: we always feel there is a world behind, unanalysed, unrepresented, which we cannot attain to. Such a character as Margaret in "Faust" is known to us to the very soul; so is Imogen; so is Ophelia. Edith Bellenden, Flora Macivor, Miss Wardour,[1] are young ladies who, we are told, were good-looking, and well dressed (according to the old fashion), and sensible; but we feel we know but very little of them, and they do not haunt our imaginations. The failure of Scott in this line of art is more conspicuous, because he had not in any remarkable degree the later experience of female detail, with which some minds have endeavoured to supply the want of the early essential imagination, and which Goethe possessed in addition to it. It was rather late, according to his biographer, before Scott set up for a "squire of dames"; he was a "lame young man, very enthusiastic about ballad poetry"; he was deeply in love with a young lady, supposed to be imaginatively represented by Flora Macivor, but he was unsuccessful. It would be over-ingenious to argue, from his failing in a single love-affair, that he had no peculiar interest in young

[1] In *Old Mortality*, *Waverley* and *The Antiquary*.

ladies in general; but the whole description of his youth shows that young ladies exercised over him a rather more divided influence than is usual. Other pursuits intervened, much more than is common with persons of the imaginative temperament, and he never led the life of flirtation from which Goethe believed that he derived so much instruction. Scott's heroines, therefore, are, not unnaturally, faulty, since from a want of the very peculiar instinctive imagination he could not give us the essence of women, and from the habits of his life he could not delineate to us their detailed life with the appreciative accuracy of habitual experience. Jeanie Deans is probably the best of his heroines, and she is so because she is the least of a heroine. The plain matter-of-fact element in the peasant-girl's life and circumstances suited a robust imagination. There is little in the part of her character that is very finely described which is characteristically feminine. She is not a masculine, but she is an epicene heroine. Her love-affair with Butler, a single remarkable scene excepted, is rather commonplace than otherwise.

A similar criticism might be applied to Scott's heroes. Every one feels how commonplace they are—Waverley excepted, whose very vacillation gives him a sort of character. They have little personality. They are all of the same type; —excellent young men—rather strong—able to ride and climb and jump. They are always said to be sensible, and bear out the character by being not unwilling sometimes to talk platitudes. But we know nothing of their inner life. They are said to be in love; but we have no special account of their individual sentiments. People show their character in their love more than in anything else. These young gentlemen all love in the same way—in the vague commonplace way of this world. We have no sketch or dramatic expression of the life within. Their souls are quite unknown to us. If there is an exception, it is Edgar Ravenswood.[1] But if we look

[1] In *The Bride of Lammermoor.*

closely, we may observe that the notion which we obtain of his character, unusually broad as it is, is not a notion of him in his capacity of hero, but in his capacity of distressed peer. His proud poverty gives a distinctness which otherwise his lineaments would not have. We think little of his love; we think much of his narrow circumstances and compressed haughtiness.

The same exterior delineation of character shows itself in his treatment of men's religious nature. A novelist is scarcely, in the notion of ordinary readers, bound to deal with this at all; if he does, it will be one of his great difficulties to indicate it graphically, yet without dwelling on it. Men who purchase a novel do not wish a stone or a sermon. All lengthened reflections must be omitted; the whole armoury of pulpit eloquence. But no delineation of human nature can be considered complete which omits to deal with man in relation to the questions which occupy him as man, with his convictions as to the theory of the universe and his own destiny; the human heart throbs on few subjects with a passion so intense, so peculiar, and so typical. From an artistic view, it is a blunder to omit an element which is so characteristic of human life, which contributes so much to its animation, and which is so picturesque. A reader of a more simple mind, little apt to indulge in such criticism, feels "a want of depth," as he would speak, in delineations from which so large an element of his own most passionate and deepest nature is omitted. It can hardly be said that there is an omission of the religious nature in Scott. But, at the same time, there is no adequate delineation of it. If we refer to the facts of his life, and the view of his character which we collect from them, we shall find that his religion was of a qualified and double sort. He was a genial man of the world, and had the easy faith in the kindly[1] *Dieu des bonnes gens*, which is natural to

[1] Béranger.

such a person; and he had also a half-poetic principle of superstition in his nature, inclining him to believe in ghosts, legends, fairies, and elves, which did not affect his daily life, or possibly his superficial belief, but was nevertheless very constantly present to his fancy, and which affected, as is the constitution of human nature, through that frequency, the undefined, half-expressed, inexpressible feelings which are at the root of that belief. Superstition was a kind of Jacobitism in his religion; as a sort of absurd reliance on the hereditary principle modified insensibly his leanings in the practical world, so a belief in the existence of unevidenced, and often absurd, supernatural beings qualified his commonest speculations on the higher world. Both these elements may be thought to enter into the highest religion; there is a principle of cheerfulness which will justify in its measure a genial enjoyment, and also a principle of fear which those who think only of that enjoyment will deem superstition, and which will really become superstition in the over-anxious and credulous acceptor of it. But in a true religion these two elements will be combined. The character of God images itself very imperfectly in any human soul; but in the highest it images itself as a whole; it leaves an abiding impression which will justify anxiety and allow of happiness. The highest aim of the religious novelist would be to show how this operates in human character; to exhibit in their curious modification our religious love, and also our religious fear. In the novels of Scott the two elements appear in a state of separation, as they did in his own mind. We have the superstition of the peasantry in *The Antiquary*, in *Guy Mannering*, everywhere almost; we have likewise a pervading tone of genial easy reflection characteristic of the man of the world who produced, and agreeable to the people of the world who read, these works. But we have no picture of the two in combination. We are

scarcely led to think on the subject at all, so much do other subjects distract our interest; but if we do think, we are puzzled at the contrast. We do not know which is true, the uneasy belief of superstition, or the easy satisfaction of the world; we waver between the two, and have no suggestion even hinted to us of the possibility of a reconciliation. The character of the Puritans certainly did not in general embody such a reconciliation, but it might have been made by a sympathising artist the vehicle for a delineation of a struggle after it. The two elements of love and fear ranked side by side in their minds with an intensity which is rare even in minds that feel only one of them. The delineation of Scott is amusing, but superficial. He caught the ludicrous traits which tempt the mirthful imagination, but no other side of the character pleased him. The man of the world was displeased with their obstinate interfering zeal; their intensity of faith was an opposition force in the old Scotch polity, of which he liked to fancy the harmonious working. They were superstitious enough; but nobody likes other people's superstitions. Scott's were of a wholly different kind. He made no difficulty as to the observance of Christmas Day, and would have eaten potatoes without the faintest scruple, although their name does not occur in Scripture. Doubtless also his residence in the land of Puritanism did not incline him to give anything except a satirical representation of that belief. You must not expect from a Dissenter a faithful appreciation of the creed from which he dissents. You cannot be impartial on the religion of the place in which you live; you may believe it, or you may dislike it; it crosses your path in too many forms for you to be able to look at it with equanimity. Scott had rather a rigid form of Puritanism forced upon him in his infancy; it is asking too much to expect him to be partial to it. The aspect of religion which Scott delineates best is

that which appears in griefs, especially in the grief of strong characters. His strong *natural* nature felt the power of death. He has given us many pictures of rude and simple men subdued, if only for a moment, into devotion by its presence.

On the whole, and speaking roughly, these defects in the delineation which Scott has given us of human life are but two. He omits to give us a delineation of the soul. We have mind, manners, animation, but it is the stir of this world. We miss the consecrating power; and we miss it not only in its own peculiar sphere, which, from the difficulty of introducing the deepest elements into a novel, would have been scarcely matter for a harsh criticism, but in the place in which a novelist might most be expected to delineate it. There are perhaps such things as the love-affairs of immortal beings, but no one would learn it from Scott. His heroes and heroines are well dressed for this world, but not for another; there is nothing even in their love which is suitable for immortality. As has been noticed, Scott also omits any delineation of the abstract side of unworldly intellect. This too might not have been so severe a reproach, considering its undramatic, unanimated nature, if it had stood alone; but taken in connection with the omission which we have just spoken of, it is most important. As the union of sense and romance makes the world of Scott so characteristically agreeable,—a fascinating picture of this world in the light in which we like best to dwell on it; so the deficiency in the attenuated, striving intellect, as well as in the supernatural soul, gives to the "world" of Scott the cumbrousness and temporality—in short, the materialism—which is characteristic of the world.

We have dwelt so much on what we think are the characteristic features of Scott's imaginative representations that we have left ourselves no room to criticise the two most

natural points of criticism in a novelist—plot and style. This is not, however, so important in Scott's case as it would commonly be. He used to say: "It is of no use having a plot; you cannot keep to it". He modified and changed his thread of story from day to day,—sometimes even from bookselling reasons, and on the suggestion of others. An elaborate work of narrative art could not be produced in this way, every one will concede; the highest imagination, able to look far over the work, is necessary for that task. But the plots produced, so to say, by the pen of the writer as he passes over the events, are likely to have a freshness and a suitableness to those events, which is not possessed by the inferior writers who make up a mechanical plot before they commence. The procedure of the highest genius doubtless is scarcely a procedure: the view of the whole story comes at once upon its imagination like the delicate end and the distinct beginning of some long vista. But all minds do not possess the highest mode of conception; and among lower modes, it is doubtless better to possess the vigorous fancy which creates each separate scene in succession as it goes, than the pedantic intellect which designs everything long before it is wanted. There is a play in unconscious creation which no voluntary elaboration and preconceived fitting of distinct ideas can ever hope to produce. If the whole cannot be created by one bounding effort, it is better that each part should be created separately and in detail.

The style of Scott would deserve the highest praise if M. Thiers could establish his theory of narrative language. He maintains that a historian's language approaches perfection in proportion as it aptly communicates what is meant to be narrated without drawing any attention to itself. Scott's style fulfils this condition. Nobody rises from his works without a most vivid idea of what is related,

and no one is able to quote a single phrase in which it has been narrated. We are inclined, however, to differ from the great French historian, and to oppose to him a theory derived from a very different writer. Coleridge used to maintain that all good poetry was untranslatable into words of the same language without injury to the sense: the meaning was, in his view, to be so inseparably intertwined even with the shades of the language, that the change of a single expression would make a difference in the accompanying feeling, if not in the bare signification: consequently, all good poetry must be remembered exactly,—to change a word is to modify the essence. Rigidly this theory can only be applied to a few kinds of poetry, or special passages in which the imagination is exerting itself to the utmost, and collecting from the whole range of associated language the very expressions which it requires. The highest excitation of feeling is necessary to this peculiar felicity of choice. In calmer moments the mind has either a less choice, or less acuteness of selective power. Accordingly, in prose it would be absurd to expect any such nicety. Still, on great occasions in imaginative fiction, there should be passages in which the words seem to cleave to the matter. The excitement is as great as in poetry. The words should become part of the sense. They should attract our attention, as this is necessary to impress them on the memory; but they should not in so doing distract attention from the meaning conveyed. On the contrary, it is their inseparability from their meaning which gives them their charm and their power. In truth, Scott's language, like his sense, was such as became a bold, sagacious man of the world. He used the first sufficient words which came uppermost, and seems hardly to have been sensible, even in the works of others, of that exquisite accuracy and

inexplicable appropriateness of which we have been speaking.

To analyse in detail the faults and merits of even a few of the greatest of the Waverley Novels would be impossible in the space at our command on the present occasion. We have only attempted a general account of a few main characteristics. Every critic must, however, regret to have to leave topics so tempting to remark upon as many of Scott's stories, and a yet greater number of his characters.

CHARLES DICKENS.[1]

(1858.)

It must give Mr. Dickens much pleasure to look at the collected series of his writings. He has told us of the beginnings of *Pickwick*.

"I was," he relates in what is now the preface to that work, "a young man of three and twenty, when the present publishers, attracted by some pieces I was at that time writing in the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper (of which one series had lately been collected and published in two volumes, illustrated by my esteemed friend Mr. George Cruikshank), waited upon me to propose a something that should be published in shilling numbers—then only known to me, or I believe to anybody else, by a dim recollection of certain interminable novels in that form, which used, some five and twenty years ago, to be carried about the country by pedlars, and over some of which I remember to have shed innumerable tears, before I served my apprenticeship to Life. When I opened my door in Furnival's Inn to the managing partner who represented the firm, I recognised in him the person from whose hands I had bought, two or three years previously, and whom I had never seen before or since, my first copy of the magazine in which my first effusion—dropped stealthily one evening at twilight, with fear and trembling, into a dark letter-box, in a dark office, up a dark court in Fleet Street—appeared in all the glory of print; on which occasion, by-the-bye,—how well I recollect it!—I walked down to Westminster Hall, and turned into it for half an hour, because my eyes were so dimmed with joy and pride, that they could not bear the street, and were not fit to be seen there. I told my visitor of the coincidence, which we both hailed as a good omen; and so fell to business."

[1] Cheap Edition of the Works of Charles Dickens. *The Pickwick Papers, Nicholas Nickleby*, etc. London, 1857-8. Chapman and Hall.

After such a beginning, there must be great enjoyment in looking at the long series of closely printed green volumes, in remembering their marvellous popularity, in knowing that they are a familiar literature wherever the English language is spoken,—that they are read with admiring appreciation by persons of the highest culture at the centre of civilisation,—that they amuse, and are fit to amuse, the roughest settler in Vancouver's Island.

The penetrating power of this remarkable genius among all classes at home is not inferior to its diffusive energy abroad. The phrase "household book" has, when applied to the works of Mr. Dickens, a peculiar propriety. There is no contemporary English writer, whose works are read so generally through the whole house, who can give pleasure to the servants as well as to the mistress, to the children as well as to the master. Mr. Thackeray without doubt exercises a more potent and plastic fascination within his sphere, but that sphere is limited. It is restricted to that part of the middle class which gazes inquisitively at the "Vanity Fair" world. The delicate touches of our great satirist have, for such readers, not only the charm of wit, but likewise the interest of valuable information; he tells them of the topics which they want to know. But below this class there is another and far larger, which is incapable of comprehending the idling world, or of appreciating the accuracy of delineations drawn from it,—which would not know the difference between a picture of Grosvenor Square by Mr. Thackeray and the picture of it in a Minerva-Press novel,—which only cares for or knows of its own multifarious, industrial, fig-selling world,—and over these also Mr. Dickens has power.

It cannot be amiss to take this opportunity of investigating, even slightly, the causes of so great a popularity. And if, in the course of our article, we may seem to be

ready with over-refining criticism, or to be unduly captious with theoretical objections, we hope not to forget that so great and so diffused an influence is a *datum* for literary investigation,—that books which have been thus *tried* upon mankind and have thus succeeded, must be books of immense genius,—and that it is our duty as critics to explain, as far as we can, the nature and the limits of that genius, but never for one moment to deny or question its existence.

Men of genius may be divided into regular and irregular. Certain minds, the moment we think of them, suggest to us the ideas of symmetry and proportion. Plato's name, for example, calls up at once the impression of something ordered, measured, and settled: it is the exact contrary of everything eccentric, immature, or undeveloped. The opinions of such a mind are often erroneous, and some of them may, from change of time, of intellectual *data*, or from chance, seem not to be quite worthy of it; but the mode in which those opinions are expressed, and (as far as we can make it out) the mode in which they are framed, affect us, as we have said, with a sensation of symmetricalness. It is not very easy to define exactly to what peculiar internal characteristic this external effect is due: the feeling is distinct, but the cause is obscure; it lies hid in the peculiar constitution of great minds, and we should not wonder that it is not very easy either to conceive or to describe. On the whole, however, the effect seems to be produced by a peculiar proportionateness, in each instance, of the mind to the tasks which it undertakes, amid which we see it, and by which we measure it. Thus we feel that the powers and tendencies of Plato's mind and nature were more fit than those of any other philosopher for the due consideration and exposition of the highest problems of philosophy, of the doubts and difficulties which concern man as man. His

genius was adapted to its element; any change would mar the delicacy of the thought, or the polished accuracy of the expression. The weapon was fitted to its aim. Every instance of proportionateness does not, however, lead us to attribute this peculiar symmetry to the whole mind we are observing. The powers must not only be suited to the task undertaken, but the task itself must also be suited to a human being, and employ all the marvellous faculties with which he is endowed. The neat perfection of such a mind as Talleyrand's is the antithesis to the symmetry of genius; the niceties neither of diplomacy nor of conversation give scope to the entire powers of a great nature. We may lay down as the condition of a regular or symmetrical genius, that it should have the exact combination of powers suited to graceful and easy success in an exercise of mind great enough to task the whole intellectual nature.

On the other hand, men of irregular or unsymmetrical genius are eminent either for some one or some few peculiarities of mind, have possibly special defects on other sides of their intellectual nature, at any rate want what the scientific men of the present day would call the *definite proportion* of faculties and qualities suited to the exact work they have in hand. The foundation of many criticisms of Shakespeare is, that he is deficient in this peculiar proportion. His overteeming imagination gives at times, and not unfrequently, a great feeling of irregularity; there seems to be confusion. We have the tall trees of the forest, the majestic creations of the highest genius; but we have, besides, a bushy second growth, an obtrusion of secondary images and fancies, which prevent our taking an exact measure of such grandeur. We have not the sensation of intense simplicity, which must probably accompany the highest conceivable greatness. Such is also the basis of Mr. Hallam's criticism on Shakespeare's

language,[1] which Mr. Arnold has lately revived.[2] "His expression is often faulty," because his illustrative imagination, somewhat predominating over his other faculties, diffuses about the main expression a supplement of minor metaphors which sometimes distract the comprehension, and almost always deprive his style of the charm that arises from undeviating directness. Doubtless this is an instance of the very highest kind of irregular genius, in which all the powers exist in the mind in a very high, and almost all of them in the very highest measure, but in which from a slight excess in a single one, the charm of proportion is lessened. The most ordinary cases of irregular genius are those in which single faculties are abnormally developed, and call off the attention from all the rest of the mind by their prominence and activity. Literature, as the "fragment of fragments," is so full of the fragments of such minds that it is needless to specify instances.

Possibly it may be laid down that one of two elements is essential to a symmetrical mind. It is evident that such a mind must either apply itself to that which is theoretical or that which is practical, to the world of abstraction or to the world of objects and realities. In the former case the deductive understanding, which masters first principles, and makes deductions from them, the thin ether of the intellect,—the "mind itself by itself,"—must evidently assume a great prominence. To attempt to comprehend principles without it, is to try to swim without arms, or to fly without wings. Accordingly, in the mind of Plato, and in others like him, the abstract and deducing understanding fills a great place; the imagination seems a kind of eye to descry its data; the artistic instinct an arranging impulse, which sets in order its inferences and conclusions.

[1] *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, vol. ii., chap. vi.

[2] Preface to Matthew Arnold's *Poems*.

On the other hand, if a symmetrical mind busy itself with the active side of human life, with the world of concrete men and real things, its principal quality will be a practical sagacity, which forms with ease a distinct view and just appreciation of all the mingled objects that the world presents,—which allots to each its own place, and its intrinsic and appropriate rank. Possibly no mind gives such an idea of this sort of symmetry as Chaucer's. Everything in it seems in its place. A healthy sagacious man of the world has gone through the world; he loves it, and knows it; he dwells on it with fond appreciation; every object of the old life of "merry England" seems to fall into its precise niche in his ordered and symmetrical comprehension. The prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* is in itself a series of memorial tablets to mediæval society; each class has its tomb, and each its apt inscription. A man without such an apprehensive and broad sagacity must fail in every extensive delineation of various life; he might attempt to describe what he did not penetrate, or if by a rare discretion he avoided that mistake, his works would want the *binding element;* he would be deficient in that distinct sense of relation and combination which is necessary for the depiction of the whole of life, which gives to it unity at first, and imparts to it a mass in the memory ever afterwards. And eminence in one or other of these marking faculties—either in the deductive abstract intellect, or the practical seeing sagacity—seems essential to the mental constitution of a symmetrical genius, at least in man. There are, after all, but two principal all-important spheres in human life—thought and action; and we can hardly conceive of a masculine mind symmetrically developed, which did not evince its symmetry by an evident perfection in one or other of those pursuits, which did not leave the trace of its distinct reflection upon the one, or of its large insight upon the other of them. Possibly it may

be thought that in the sphere of pure art there may be room for a symmetrical development different from these; but it will perhaps be found, on examination of such cases, either that under peculiar and appropriate disguises one of these great qualities is present, or that the apparent symmetry is the narrow perfection of a limited nature, which may be most excellent in itself, as in the stricter form of sacred art, but which, as we explained, is quite opposed to that broad perfection of the thinking being, to which we have applied the name of the symmetry of genius.

If this classification of men of genius be admitted, there can be no hesitation in assigning to Mr. Dickens his place in it. His genius is essentially irregular and unsymmetrical. Hardly any English writer perhaps is much more so. His style is an example of it. It is descriptive, racy, and flowing; it is instinct with new imagery and singular illustration; but it does not indicate that due proportion of the faculties to one another which is a beauty in itself, and which cannot help diffusing beauty over every happy word and moulded clause. We may choose an illustration at random. The following graphic description will do:—

"If Lord George Gordon had appeared in the eyes of Mr. Willet, overnight, a nobleman of somewhat quaint and odd exterior, the impression was confirmed this morning, and increased a hundred-fold Sitting bolt upright upon his bony steed, with his long, straight hair dangling about his face and fluttering in the wind; his limbs all angular and rigid, his elbows stuck out on either side ungracefully, and his whole frame jogged and shaken at every motion of his horse's feet; a more grotesque or more ungainly figure can hardly be conceived. In lieu of whip, he carried in his hand a great gold-headed cane, as large as any footman carries in these days; and his various modes of holding this unwieldy weapon—now upright before his face like the sabre of a horse-soldier, now over his shoulder like a musket, now between his finger and thumb, but always in some uncouth and awkward fashion—contributed in no small degree to the absurdity of his appearance. Stiff, lank, and solemn, dressed in an unusual manner, and ostentatiously exhibiting—

whether by design or accident—all his peculiarities of carriage, gesture, and conduct, all the qualities, natural and artificial, in which he differed from other men, he might have moved the sternest looker-on to laughter, and fully provoked the smiles and whispered jests which greeted his departure from the Maypole Inn.

"Quite unconscious, however, of the effect he produced, he trotted on beside his secretary, talking to himself nearly all the way, until they came within a mile or two of London, when now and then some passenger went by who knew him by sight, and pointed him out to some one else, and perhaps stood looking after him, or cried in jest or earnest as it might be, 'Hurrah, Geordie! No Popery!' At which he would gravely pull off his hat and bow. When they reached the town and rode along the streets, these notices became more frequent; some laughed, some hissed, some turned their heads and smiled, some wondered who he was, some ran along the pavement by his side and cheered. When this happened in a crush of carts and chairs and coaches, he would make a dead stop, and pulling off his hat, cry, 'Gentlemen, No Popery!' to which the gentlemen would respond with lusty voices, and with three times three; and then on he would go again with a score or so of the raggedest following at his horse's heels, and shouting till their throats were parched.

"The old ladies too—there were a great many old ladies in the streets, and these all knew him. Some of them—not those of the highest rank, but such as sold fruit from baskets and carried burdens—clapped their shrivelled hands, and raised a weazen, piping, shrill 'Hurrah, my lord'. Others waved their hands or handkerchiefs, or shook their fans or parasols, or threw up windows, and called in haste to those within to come and see. All these marks of popular esteem he received with profound gravity and respect; bowing very low, and so frequently that his hat was more off his head than on; and looking up at the houses as he passed along, with the air of one who was making a public entry, and yet was not puffed-up or proud."[1]

No one would think of citing such a passage as this, as exemplifying the proportioned beauty of finished writing; it is not the writing of an evenly developed or of a highly cultured mind; it abounds in jolts and odd turns; it is full of singular twists and needless complexities: but, on the

[1] *Barnaby Rudge*, chap. xxxvii.

other hand, no one can deny its great and peculiar merit. It is an odd style, and it is very odd how much you read it. It is the overflow of a copious mind, though not the chastened expression of a harmonious one.

The same quality characterises the matter of his works. His range is very varied. He has attempted to describe every kind of scene in English life, from quite the lowest to almost the highest. He has not endeavoured to secure success by confining himself to a single path, nor wearied the public with repetitions of the subjects by the delineation of which he originally obtained fame. In his earlier works he never writes long without saying something well; something which no other man would have said; but even in them it is the characteristic of his power that it is apt to fail him at once; from masterly strength we pass without interval to almost infantine weakness,—something like disgust succeeds in a moment to an extreme admiration. Such is the natural fate of an unequal mind employing itself on a vast and variegated subject. In writing on the Waverley Novels, we ventured to make a division of novels into the ubiquitous—it would have been perhaps better to say the miscellaneous—and the sentimental: the first, as its name implies, busying itself with the whole of human life, the second restricting itself within a peculiar and limited theme. Mr. Dickens's novels are all of the former class. They aim to delineate nearly all that part of our national life which can be delineated,—at least, within the limits which social morality prescribes to social art; but you cannot read his delineation of any part without being struck with its singular incompleteness. An artist once said of the best work of another artist: "Yes, it is a pretty patch". If we might venture on the phrase, we should say that Mr. Dickens's pictures are graphic scraps; his best books are compilations of them.

The truth is, that Mr. Dickens wholly wants the two elements which we have spoken of, as one or other requisite for a symmetrical genius. He is utterly deficient in the faculty of reasoning. "Mamma, what shall I think about?" said the small girl. "My dear, don't think," was the old-fashioned reply. We do not allege that in the strict theory of education this was a correct reply; modern writers think otherwise; but we wish some one would say it to Mr. Dickens. He is often troubled with the idea that he must reflect, and his reflections are perhaps the worst reading in the world. There is a sentimental confusion about them; we never find the consecutive precision of mature theory, or the cold distinctness of clear thought. Vivid facts stand out in his imagination; and a fresh illustrative style brings them home to the imagination of his readers; but his continuous philosophy utterly fails in the attempt to harmonise them,—to educe a theory or elaborate a precept from them. Of his social thinking we shall have a few words to say in detail; his didactic humour is very unfortunate: no writer is less fitted for an excursion to the imperative mood. At present, we only say, what is so obvious as scarcely to need saying, that his abstract understanding is so far inferior to his picturesque imagination as to give even to his best works the sense of jar and incompleteness, and to deprive them altogether of the crystalline finish which is characteristic of the clear and cultured understanding.

Nor has Mr. Dickens the easy and various sagacity which, as has been said, gives a unity to all which it touches. He has, indeed, a quality which is near allied to it in appearance. His shrewdness in some things, especially in traits and small things, is wonderful. His works are full of acute remarks on petty doings, and well exemplify the telling power of minute circumstantiality. But the minor species of perceptive sharpness is so different from diffused sagacity,

that the two scarcely ever are to be found in the same mind. There is nothing less like the great lawyer, acquainted with broad principles and applying them with distinct deduction, than the attorney's clerk who catches at small points like a dog biting at flies. "Over-sharpness" in the student is the most unpromising symptom of the logical jurist. You must not ask a horse in blinkers for a large view of a landscape. In the same way, a detective ingenuity in microscopic detail is of all mental qualities most unlike the broad sagacity by which the great painters of human affairs have unintentionally stamped the mark of unity on their productions. They show by their treatment of each case that they understand the whole of life; the special delineator of fragments and points shows that he understands them only. In one respect the defect is more striking in Mr. Dickens than in any other novelist of the present day. The most remarkable deficiency in modern fiction is its omission of the business of life, of all those countless occupations, pursuits, and callings in which most men live and move, and by which they have their being. In most novels money *grows*. You have no idea of the toil, the patience, and the wearing anxiety by which men of action provide for the day, and lay up for the future, and support those that are given into their care. Mr. Dickens is not chargeable with this omission. He perpetually deals with the pecuniary part of life. Almost all his characters have determined occupations, of which he is apt to talk even at too much length. When he rises from the toiling to the luxurious classes, his genius in most cases deserts him. The delicate refinement and discriminating taste of the idling orders are not in his way; he knows the dry arches of London Bridge better than Belgravia. He excels in inventories of poor furniture, and is learned in pawnbrokers' tickets. But, although his creative power lives and works among the middle class and industrial section of

English society, he has never painted the highest part of their daily intellectual life. He made, indeed, an attempt to paint specimens of the apt and able man of business in *Nicholas Nickleby;* but the Messrs. Cheeryble are among the stupidest of his characters. He forgot that breadth of platitude is rather different from breadth of sagacity. His delineations of middle-class life have in consequence a harshness and meanness which do not belong to that life in reality. He omits the relieving element. He describes the figs which are sold, but not the talent which sells figs well. And it is the same want of diffused sagacity in his own nature which has made his pictures of life so odd and disjointed, and which has deprived them of symmetry and unity.

The *bizarrerie* of Mr. Dickens's genius is rendered more remarkable by the inordinate measure of his special excellences. The first of these is his power of observation in detail. We have heard,—we do not know whether correctly or incorrectly,—that he can go down a crowded street, and tell you all that is in it, what each shop was, what the grocer's name was, how many scraps of orange-peel there were on the pavement. His works give you exactly the same idea. The amount of detail which there is in them is something amazing,—to an ordinary writer something incredible. There are single pages containing telling *minutiæ*, which other people would have thought enough for a volume. Nor is his sensibility to external objects, though omnivorous, insensible to the artistic effect of each. There are scarcely anywhere such pictures of London as he draws. No writer has equally comprehended the artistic material which is given by its extent, its aggregation of different elements, its mouldiness, its brilliancy.

Nor does his genius—though, from some idiosyncrasy of mind or accident of external situation, it is more especially directed to city life—at all stop at the city wall. He is

especially at home in the picturesque and obvious parts of country life, particularly in the comfortable and (so to say) mouldering portion of it. The following is an instance; if not the best that could be cited, still one of the best:—

"They arranged to proceed upon their journey next evening, as a stage-waggon, which travelled for some distance on the same road as they must take, would stop at the inn to change horses, and the driver for a small gratuity would give Nell a place inside. A bargain was soon struck when the waggon came; and in due time it rolled away; with the child comfortably bestowed among the softer packages, her grandfather and the schoolmaster walking on beside the driver, and the landlady and all the good folks of the inn screaming out their good wishes and farewells.

"What a soothing, luxurious, drowsy way of travelling, to lie inside that slowly-moving mountain, listening to the tinkling of the horses' bells, the occasional smacking of the carter's whip, the smooth rolling of the great broad wheels, the rattle of the harness, the cheery good-nights of passing travellers jogging past on little short-stepped horses—all made pleasantly indistinct by the thick awning, which seemed made for lazy listening under, till one fell asleep! The very going to sleep, still with an indistinct idea, as the head jogged to and fro upon the pillow, of moving onward with no trouble or fatigue, and hearing all these sounds like dreamy music, lulling to the senses—and the slow waking up, and finding one's self staring out through the breezy curtain half-opened in the front, far up into the cold bright sky with its countless stars, and downwards at the driver's lantern dancing on like its namesake Jack of the swamps and marshes, and sideways at the dark grim trees, and forward at the long bare road rising up, up, up, until it stopped abruptly at a sharp high ridge as if there were no more road, and all beyond was sky—and the stopping at the inn to bait, and being helped out, and going into a room with fire and candles, and winking very much, and being agreeably reminded that the night was cold, and anxious for very comfort's sake to think it colder than it was! What a delicious journey was that journey in the waggon!

"Then the going on again—so fresh at first, and shortly afterwards so sleepy. The waking from a sound nap as the mail came dashing past like a highway comet, with gleaming lamps and rattling hoofs, and visions of a guard behind, standing up to keep his feet warm, and of a gentleman in a fur cap opening his eyes and looking wild and

stupefied—the stopping at the turnpike, where the man has gone to bed, and knocking at the door until he answered with a smothered shout from under the bed-clothes in the little room above, where the faint light was burning, and presently came down, night-capped and shivering, to throw the gate wide open, and wish all waggons off the road except by day. The cold sharp interval between night and morning—the distant streak of light widening and spreading, and turning from grey to white, and from white to yellow, and from yellow to burning red—the presence of day, with all its cheerfulness and life—men and horses at the plough—birds in the trees and hedges, and boys in solitary fields frightening them away with rattles. The coming to a town—people busy in the market; light carts and chaises round the tavern yard; tradesmen standing at their doors; men running horses up and down the street for sale; pigs plunging and grunting in the dirty distance, getting off with long strings at their legs, running into clean chemists' shops and being dislodged with brooms by 'prentices; the night-coach changing horses—the passengers cheerless, cold, ugly, and discontented, with three months' growth of hair in one night—the coachman fresh as from a bandbox, and exquisitely beautiful by contrast:—so much bustle, so many things in motion, such a variety of incidents—when was there a journey with so many delights as that journey in the waggon!"[1]

Or, as a relief from a very painful series of accompanying characters, it is pleasant to read and remember the description of the fine morning on which Mr. Jonas Chuzzlewit does not reflect. Mr. Dickens has, however, no feeling analogous to the nature-worship of some other recent writers. There is nothing Wordsworthian in his bent; the interpreting inspiration (as that school speak) is not his. Nor has he the erudition in difficult names which has filled some pages in late novelists with mineralogy and botany. His descriptions of Nature are fresh and superficial; they are not sermonic or scientific.

Nevertheless, it may be said that Mr. Dickens's genius is especially suited to the delineation of city life. London is

[1] *Old Curiosity Shop*, chap. xlvi.

like a newspaper. Everything is there, and everything is disconnected. There is every kind of person in some houses; but there is no more connection between the houses than between the neighbours in the lists of "births, marriages, and deaths". As we change from the broad leader to the squalid police report, we pass a corner and we are in a changed world. This is advantageous to Mr. Dickens's genius. His memory is full of instances of old buildings and curious people, and he does not care to piece them together. On the contrary, each scene, to his mind, is a separate scene,—each street a separate street. He has, too, the peculiar alertness of observation that is observable in those who live by it. He describes London like a special correspondent for posterity.

A second most wonderful special faculty which Mr. Dickens possesses is what we may call his *vivification* of character, or rather of characteristics. His marvellous power of observation has been exercised upon men and women even more than upon town or country; and the store of human detail, so to speak, in his books is endless and enormous. The boots at the inn, the pickpockets in the street, the undertaker, the Mrs. Gamp, are all of them at his disposal; he knows each trait and incident, and he invests them with a kind of perfection in detail which in reality they do not possess. He has a very peculiar power of taking hold of some particular traits, and making a character out of them. He is especially apt to incarnate particular professions in this way. Many of his people never speak without some allusion to their occupation. You cannot separate them from it. Nor does the writer ever separate them. What would Mr. Mould[1] be if not an undertaker? or Mrs. Gamp[2] if not a nurse? or Charley Bates[3] if not a pickpocket? Not only is human nature in them subdued tc

[1] In *Martin Chuzzlewit.* [2] *Ibid.* [3] In *Oliver Twist.*

what it works in, but there seems to be no nature to subdue; the whole character is the idealisation of a trade, and is not in fancy or thought distinguishable from it. Accordingly, of necessity, such delineations become caricatures. We do not in general contrast them with reality; but as soon as we do, we are struck with the monstrous exaggerations which they present. You could no more fancy Sam Weller, or Mark Tapley, or the Artful Dodger[1] really existing, walking about among common ordinary men and women, than you can fancy a talking duck or a writing bear. They are utterly beyond the pale of ordinary social intercourse. We suspect, indeed, that Mr. Dickens does not conceive his characters to himself as mixing in the society he mixes in. He sees people in the street, doing certain things, talking in a certain way, and his fancy petrifies them in the act. He goes on fancying hundreds of reduplications of that act and that speech; he frames an existence in which there is nothing else but that aspect which attracted his attention. Sam Weller is an example. He is a man-servant, who makes a peculiar kind of jokes, and is wonderfully felicitous in certain similes. You see him at his first introduction:—

"'My friend,' said the thin gentleman.

"'You're one o' the adwice gratis order,' thought Sam, 'or you wouldn't be so werry fond o' me all at once.' But he only said—'Well, sir?'

"'My friend,' said the thin gentleman, with a conciliatory hem—'have you got many people stopping here, now? Pretty busy? Eh?'

"Sam stole a look at the inquirer. He was a little high-dried man, with a dark squeezed-up face, and small restless black eyes, that kept winking and twinkling on each side of his little inquisitive nose, as if they were playing a perpetual game of peep-bo with that feature. He was dressed all in black, with boots as shiny as his eyes, a low white neckcloth, and a clean shirt with a frill to it. A gold watch-chain and seals

[1] In the *Pickwick Papers*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Oliver Twist*.

depended from his fob. He carried his black kid gloves *in* his hands, not *on* them; and, as he spoke, thrust his wrists beneath his coat-tails, with the air of a man who was in the habit of propounding some regular posers.

"'Pretty busy, eh?' said the little man.

"'Oh, werry well, sir,' replied Sam, 'we shan't be bankrupts, and we shan't make our fort'ns. We eat our biled mutton without capers, and don't care for horse-radish wen ve can get beef.'

"'Ah,' said the little man, 'you're a wag, ain't you?'

"'My eldest brother was troubled with that complaint,' said Sam, 'it may be catching—I used to sleep with him.'

"'This is a curious old house of yours,' said the little man, looking round him.

"'If you'd sent word you was a-coming, we'd ha' had it repaired,' replied the imperturbable Sam.

"The little man seemed rather baffled by these several repulses, and a short consultation took place between him and the two plump gentlemen. At its conclusion, the little man took a pinch of snuff from an oblong silver box, and was apparently on the point of renewing the conversation, when one of the plump gentlemen, who, in addition to a benevolent countenance, possessed a pair of spectacles and a pair of black gaiters, interfered—

"'The fact of the matter is,' said the benevolent gentleman, 'that my friend here' (pointing to the other plump gentleman) 'will give you half a guinea, if you'll answer one or two ——'

"'Now, my dear sir—my dear sir,' said the little man, 'pray allow me—my dear sir, the very first principle to be observed in these cases is this: if you place a matter in the hands of a professional man, you must in no way interfere in the progress of the business; you must repose implicit confidence in him. Really, Mr.' (he turned to the other plump gentleman, and said)—'I forget your friend's name.'

"'Pickwick,' said Mr. Wardle, for it was no other than that jolly personage.

"'Ah, Pickwick—really Mr. Pickwick, my dear sir, excuse me—I shall be happy to receive any private suggestions of yours, as *amicus curiæ*, but you must see the impropriety of your interfering with my conduct in this case, with such an *ad captandum* argument as the offer of half a guinea. Really, my dear sir, really,' and the little man took an argumentative pinch of snuff, and looked very profound.

"'My only wish, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'was to bring this very unpleasant matter to as speedy a close as possible.'

"'Quite right—quite right,' said the little man.

"'With which view,' continued Mr. Pickwick, 'I made use of the argument which my experience of men has taught me is the most likely to succeed in any case.'

"'Ay, ay,' said the little man, 'very good, very good indeed; but you should have suggested it to *me*. My dear sir, I'm quite certain you cannot be ignorant of the extent of confidence which must be placed in professional men. If any authority can be necessary on such a point, my dear sir, let me refer you to the well-known case in Barnwell and ——'

"'Never mind George Barnwell,' interrupted Sam, who had remained a wondering listener during this short colloquy; 'everybody knows vat sort of a case his was, tho' it's always been my opinion, mind you, that the young 'ooman deserved scragging a precious sight more than he did. Hows'ever, that's neither here nor there. You want me to except of half a guinea. Werry well, I'm agreeable: I can't say no fairer than that, can I, sir?' (Mr. Pickwick smiled.) 'Then the next question is, what the devil do you want with me? as the man said wen he see the ghost.'

"'We want to know ——' said Mr. Wardle.

"'Now, my dear sir—my dear sir,' interposed the busy little man.

"Mr. Wardle shrugged his shoulders and was silent.

"'We want to know,' said the little man solemnly; 'and we ask the question of you, in order that we may not awaken apprehensions inside—we want to know who you've got in this house at present.'

"'Who there is in the house!' said Sam, in whose mind the inmates were always represented by that particular article of their costume which came under his immediate superintendence. 'There's a wooden leg in number six; there's a pair of Hessians in thirteen; there's two pair of halves in the commercial; there's these here painted tops in the snuggery inside the bar; and five more tops in the coffee-room.'

"'Nothing more?' said the little man.

"'Stop a bit,' replied Sam, suddenly recollecting himself. 'Yes; there's a pair of Wellingtons a good deal worn, and a pair o' lady's shoes, in number five.'

"'What sort of shoes?' hastily inquired Wardle, who, together with Mr. Pickwick, had been lost in bewilderment at the singular catalogue of visitors.

"'Country make,' replied Sam.

"'Any maker's name?'

"'Brown.'

"'Where of?'

"'Muggleton.'

"'It *is* them,' exclaimed Wardle. 'By Heavens, we've found them.'

"'Hush!' said Sam. 'The Wellingtons has gone to Doctors Commons.'

"'No,' said the little man.

"'Yes, for a license.'

"'We're in time,' exclaimed Wardle. 'Show us the room; not a moment is to be lost.'

"'Pray, my dear sir—pray,' said the little man; 'caution, caution.' He drew from his pocket a red silk purse, and looked very hard at Sam as he drew out a sovereign.

"Sam grinned expressively.

"'Show us into the room at once, without announcing us,' said the little man, 'and it's yours.'"[1]

One can fancy Mr. Dickens hearing a dialogue of this sort,—not nearly so good, but something like it,—and immediately setting to work to make it better and put it in a book; then changing a little the situation, putting the boots one step up in the scale of service, engaging him as footman to a stout gentleman (but without for a moment losing sight of the peculiar kind of professional conversation and humour which his first dialogue presents), and astonishing all his readers by the marvellous fertility and magical humour with which he maintains that style. Sam Weller's father is even a stronger and simpler instance. He is simply nothing but an old coachman of the stout and extinct sort: you cannot separate him from the idea of that occupation. But how amusing he is! We dare not quote a single word of his talk; because we should go on quoting so long, and every one knows it so well. Some persons may think that this is not a very high species of delineative art. The idea of personifying traits and trades may seem to them poor and meagre. Anybody, they may fancy, can do that. But

[1] *Pickwick Papers*, chap. ix.

how would they do it? Whose fancy would not break down in a page—in five lines? Who can carry on the vivification with zest and energy and humour for volume after volume? Endless fertility in laughter-causing detail is Mr. Dickens's most astonishing peculiarity. It requires a continuous and careful reading of his works to be aware of his enormous wealth. Writers have attained the greatest reputation for wit and humour, whose whole works do not contain so much of either as are to be found in a very few pages of his.

Mr. Dickens's humour is indeed very much a result of the two peculiarities of which we have been speaking. His power of detailed observation and his power of idealising individual traits of character—sometimes of one or other of them, sometimes of both of them together. His similes on matters of external observation are so admirable that everybody appreciates them, and it would be absurd to quote specimens of them; nor is it the sort of excellence which best bears to be paraded for the purposes of critical example. Its off-hand air and natural connection with the adjacent circumstances are inherent parts of its peculiar merit. Every reader of Mr. Dickens's works knows well what we mean. And who is not a reader of them?

But his peculiar humour is even more indebted to his habit of vivifying external traits, than to his power of external observation. He, as we have explained, expands traits into people; and it is a source of true humour to place these, when so expanded, in circumstances in which only people—that is complete human beings—can appropriately act. The humour of Mr. Pickwick's character is entirely of this kind. He is a kind of incarnation of simple-mindedness and what we may call obvious-mindedness. The conclusion which each occurrence or position in life most immediately presents to the unsophisticated mind is

that which Mr. Pickwick is sure to accept. The proper accompaniments are given to him. He is a stout gentleman in easy circumstances, who is irritated into originality by no impulse from within, and by no stimulus from without. He is stated to have "retired from business". But no one can fancy what he was in business. Such guileless simplicity of heart and easy impressibility of disposition would soon have induced a painful failure amid the harsh struggles and the tempting speculations of pecuniary life. As he is represented in the narrative, however, nobody dreams of such antecedents. Mr. Pickwick moves easily over all the surface of English life from Goswell Street to Dingley Dell, from Dingley Dell to the Ipswich elections, from drinking milk-punch in a wheelbarrow to sleeping in the approximate pound, and no one ever thinks of applying to him the ordinary maxims which we should apply to any common person in life, or to any common personage in a fiction. Nobody thinks it is wrong in Mr. Pickwick to drink too much milk-punch in a wheelbarrow, to introduce worthless people of whom he knows nothing to the families of people for whom he really cares; nobody holds him responsible for the consequences; nobody thinks there is anything wrong in his taking Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen to visit Mr. Winkle, senior, and thereby almost irretrievably offending him with his son's marriage. We do not reject moral remarks such as these, but they never occur to us. Indeed, the indistinct consciousness that such observations are possible, and that they are hovering about our minds, enhances the humour of the narrative. We are in a conventional world, where the mere maxims of common life do not apply, and yet which has all the amusing detail, and picturesque elements, and singular eccentricities of common life. Mr. Pickwick is a personified ideal; a kind of amateur in life, whose course

we watch through all the circumstances of ordinary existence, and at whose follies we are amused just as really skilled people are at the mistakes of an amateur in their art. His being in the pound is not wrong; his being the victim of Messrs. Dodson is not foolish. "Always shout with the mob," said Mr. Pickwick. "But suppose there are two mobs," said Mr. Snodgrass. "Then shout with the loudest," said Mr. Pickwick. This is not in him weakness or time-serving, or want of principle, as in most even of fictitious people it would be. It is his way. Mr. Pickwick was expected to say something, so he said "Ah!" in a grave voice. This is not pompous as we might fancy, or clever as it might be, if intentionally devised; it is simply his way. Mr. Pickwick gets late at night over the wall behind the back-door of a young-ladies' school, is found in that sequestered place by the schoolmistress and the boarders and the cook, and there is a dialogue between them.[1] There is nothing out of possibility in this; it is his way. The humour essentially consists in treating as a moral agent a being who really is not a moral agent. We treat a vivified accident as a man, and we are surprised at the absurd results. We are reading about an acting thing, and we wonder at its scrapes, and laugh at them as if they were those of the man. There is something of this humour in every sort of farce. Everybody knows these are not real beings acting in real life, though they talk as if they were, and want us to believe that they are. Here, as in Mr. Dickens's books, we have exaggerations pretending to comport themselves as ordinary beings, caricatures acting as if they were characters.

At the same time it is essential to remember, that however great may be and is the charm of such exaggerated personifications, the best specimens of them are immensely less excellent, belong to an altogether lower range of intel-

lectual achievements, than the real depiction of actual living men. It is amusing to read of beings *out* of the laws of morality, but it is more profoundly interesting, as well as more instructive, to read of those whose life in its moral conditions resembles our own. We see this most distinctly when both representations are given by the genius of one and the same writer. Falstaff is a sort of sack-holding paunch, an exaggerated over-development which no one thinks of holding down to the commonplace rules of the ten commandments and the statute-law. We do not think of them in connection with him. They belong to a world apart. Accordingly, we are vexed when the king discards him and reproves him. Such a fate was a necessary adherence on Shakespeare's part to the historical tradition; he never probably thought of departing from it, nor would his audience have perhaps endured his doing so. But to those who look at the historical plays as pure works of imaginative art, it seems certainly an artistic misconception to have developed so marvellous an *un*moral impersonation, and then to have subjected it to an ethical and punitive judgment. Still, notwithstanding this error, which was very likely inevitable, Falstaff is probably the most remarkable specimen of caricature-representation to be found in literature. And its very excellence of execution only shows how inferior is the kind of art which creates only such representations. Who could compare the genius, marvellous as must be its fertility, which was needful to create a Falstaff, with that shown in the higher productions of the same mind in Hamlet, Ophelia, and Lear? We feel instantaneously the difference between the aggregating accident which rakes up from the externalities of life other accidents analogous to itself, and the central ideal of a real character which cannot show itself wholly in any accidents, but which exemplifies itself partially in many, which unfolds itself gradually in wide spheres of action, and

yet, as with those we know best in life, leaves something hardly to be understood, and after years of familiarity is a problem and a difficulty to the last. In the same way, the embodied characteristics and grotesque exaggerations of Mr. Dickens, notwithstanding all their humour and all their marvellous abundance, can never be for a moment compared with the great works of the real painters of essential human nature.

There is one class of Mr. Dickens's pictures which may seem to form an exception to this criticism. It is the delineation of the outlaw, we might say the anti-law, world in *Oliver Twist*. In one or two instances Mr. Dickens has been so fortunate as to hit on characteristics which, by his system of idealisation and continual repetition, might really be brought to look like a character. A man's trade or profession in regular life can only exhaust a very small portion of his nature; no approach is made to the essence of humanity by the exaggeration of the traits which typify a beadle or an undertaker. With the outlaw world it is somewhat different. The bare fact of a man belonging to the world is so important to his nature, that if it is artistically developed with coherent accessories, some approximation to a distinctly natural character will be almost inevitably made. In the characters of Bill Sykes and Nancy this is so. The former is the skulking ruffian who may be seen any day at the police-courts, and whom any one may fancy he sees by walking through St. Giles's. You cannot attempt to figure to your imagination the existence of such a person without being thrown into the region of the passions, the will, and the conscience; the mere fact of his maintaining, as a condition of life and by settled profession, a struggle with regular society, necessarily brings these deep parts of his nature into prominence; great crime usually proceeds from abnormal impulses or strange effort. Accordingly,

Mr. Sykes is the character most approaching to a coherent man who is to be found in Mr. Dickens's works. We do not say that even here there is not some undue heightening admixture of caricature,—but this defect is scarcely thought of amid the general coherence of the picture, the painful subject, and the wonderful command of strange accessories. Miss Nancy is a still more delicate artistic effort. She is an idealisation of the girl who may also be seen at the police-courts and St. Giles's; as bad, according to occupation and common character, as a woman can be, yet retaining a tinge of womanhood, and a certain compassion for interesting suffering, which under favouring circumstances might be the germ of a regenerating influence. We need not stay to prove how much the imaginative development of such a personage must concern itself with our deeper humanity; how strongly, if excellent, it must be contrasted with everything conventional or casual or superficial. Mr. Dickens's delineation is in the highest degree excellent. It possesses not only the more obvious merits belonging to the subject, but also that of a singular delicacy of expression and idea. Nobody fancies for a moment that they are reading about anything beyond the pale of ordinary propriety. We read the account of the life which Miss Nancy leads with Bill Sykes without such an idea occurring to us: yet when we reflect upon it, few things in literary painting are more wonderful than the depiction of a professional life of sin and sorrow, so as not even to startle those to whom the deeper forms of either are but names and shadows. Other writers would have given as vivid a picture: Defoe would have poured out even a more copious measure of telling circumstantiality, but he would have narrated his story with an inhuman distinctness, which if not impure is *un*pure; French writers, whom we need not name, would have enhanced the interest of their narrative by trading on

the excitement of stimulating scenes. It would be injustice to Mr. Dickens to say that he has surmounted these temptations; the unconscious evidence of innumerable details proves that, from a certain delicacy of imagination and purity of spirit, he has not even experienced them. Criticism is the more bound to dwell at length on the merits of these delineations, because no artistic merit can make *Oliver Twist* a pleasing work. The squalid detail of crime and misery oppresses us too much. If it is to be read at all, it should be read in the first hardness of the youthful imagination, which no touch can move too deeply, and which is never stirred with tremulous suffering at the "still sad music of humanity".[1] The coldest critic in later life may never hope to have again the apathy of his boyhood.

It perhaps follows from what has been said of the characteristics of Mr. Dickens's genius, that it would be little skilled in planning plots for his novels. He certainly is not so skilled. He says in his preface to the *Pickwick Papers* "that they were designed for the introduction of diverting characters and incidents; that no ingenuity of plot was attempted, or even at that time considered feasible by the author in connection with the desultory plan of publication adopted;" and he adds an expression of regret that "these chapters had not been strung together on a thread of more general interest". It is extremely fortunate that no such attempt was made. In the cases in which Mr. Dickens has attempted to make a long connected story, or to develop into scenes or incidents a plan in any degree elaborate, the result has been a complete failure. A certain consistency of genius seems necessary for the construction of a consecutive plot. An irregular mind naturally shows itself in incoherency of incident and aberration of character. The method in which Mr. Dickens's mind works, if we are correct in our criticism

[1] Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey".

upon it, tends naturally to these blemishes. Caricatures are necessarily isolated; they are produced by the exaggeration of certain conspicuous traits and features; each being is enlarged on its greatest side; and we laugh at the grotesque grouping and the startling contrast. But that connection between human beings on which a plot depends is rather severed than elucidated by the enhancement of their diversities. Interesting stories are founded on the intimate relations of men and women. These intimate relations are based not on their superficial traits, or common occupations, or most visible externalities, but on the inner life of heart and feeling. You simply divert attention from that secret life by enhancing the perceptible diversities of common human nature, and the strange anomalies into which it may be distorted. The original germ of *Pickwick* was a "Club of Oddities". The idea was professedly abandoned; but traces of it are to be found in all Mr. Dickens's books. It illustrates the professed grotesqueness of the characters as well as their slender connection.

The defect of plot is heightened by Mr. Dickens's great, we might say complete, inability to make a love-story. A pair of lovers is by custom a necessity of narrative fiction, and writers who possess a great general range of mundane knowledge, and but little knowledge of the special sentimental subject, are often in amusing difficulties. The watchful reader observes the transition from the hearty description of well-known scenes, of prosaic streets, or journeys by wood and river, to the pale colours of ill-attempted poetry, to such sights as the novelist evidently wishes that he need not try to see. But few writers exhibit the difficulty in so aggravated a form as Mr. Dickens. Most men by taking thought can make a lay figure to look not so very unlike a young gentleman, and can compose a telling schedule of ladylike charms. Mr. Dickens has no power of doing either,

The heroic character—we do not mean the form of character so called in life and action, but that which is hereditary in the heroes of novels—is not suited to his style of art. Hazlitt wrote an essay to inquire "Why the heroes of romances are insipid"; and without going that length it may safely be said that the character of the agreeable young gentleman who loves and is loved should not be of the most marked sort. Flirtation ought not to be an exaggerated pursuit. Young ladies and their admirers should not express themselves in the heightened and imaginative phraseology suited to Charley Bates and the Dodger. Humour is of no use, for no one makes love in jokes: a tinge of insidious satire may perhaps be permitted as a rare and occasional relief, but it will not be thought "a pretty book," if so malicious an element be at all habitually perceptible. The broad farce in which Mr. Dickens indulges is thoroughly out of place. If you caricature a pair of lovers ever so little, by the necessity of their calling you make them ridiculous. One of Sheridan's best comedies[1] is remarkable for having no scene in which the hero and heroine are on the stage together; and Mr. Moore suggests[2] that the shrewd wit distrusted his skill in the light, dropping love-talk which would have been necessary. Mr. Dickens would have done well to imitate so astute a policy; but he has none of the managing shrewdness which those who look at Sheridan's career attentively will probably think not the least remarkable feature in his singular character. Mr. Dickens, on the contrary, pours out painful sentiments as if he wished the abundance should make up for the inferior quality. The excruciating writing which is expended on Miss Ruth Pinch[3] passes belief. Mr. Dickens is not only unable to make

[1] "School for Scandal."
[2] *Life of Sheridan*, vol. i., chap. v,
[3] In *Martin Chuzzlewit*,

lovers talk, but to describe heroines in mere narrative. As has been said, most men can make a jumble of blue eyes and fair hair and pearly teeth, that does very well for a young lady, at least for a good while; but Mr. Dickens will not, probably cannot, attain even to this humble measure of descriptive art. He vitiates the repose by broad humour, or disenchants the delicacy by an unctuous admiration.

This deficiency is probably nearly connected with one of Mr. Dickens's most remarkable excellences. No one can read Mr. Thackeray's writings without feeling that he is perpetually treading as close as he dare to the border-line that separates the world which may be described in books from the world which it is prohibited so to describe. No one knows better than this accomplished artist where that line is, and how curious are its windings and turns. The charge against him is that he knows it but too well; that with an anxious care and a wistful eye he is ever approximating to its edge, and hinting with subtle art how thoroughly he is familiar with, and how interesting he could make, the interdicted region on the other side. He never violates a single conventional rule; but at the same time the shadow of the immorality that is not seen is scarcely ever wanting to his delineation of the society that is seen. Every one may perceive what is passing in his fancy. Mr. Dickens is chargeable with no such defect: he does not seem to feel the temptation. By what we may fairly call an instinctive purity of genius, he not only observes the conventional rules, but makes excursions into topics which no other novelist could safely handle, and, by a felicitous instinct, deprives them of all impropriety. No other writer could have managed the humour of Mrs. Gamp without becoming unendurable. At the same time it is difficult not to believe that this singular insensibility to the temptations to which many of the greatest novelists have succumbed is in some

measure connected with his utter inaptitude for delineating the portion of life to which their art is specially inclined. He delineates neither the love-affairs which ought to be, nor those which ought not to be.

Mr. Dickens's indisposition to "make capital" out of the most commonly tempting part of human sentiment is the more remarkable because he certainly does not show the same indisposition in other cases. He has naturally great powers of pathos; his imagination is familiar with the common sort of human suffering; and his marvellous conversancy with the detail of existence enables him to describe sick-beds and death-beds with an excellence very rarely seen in literature. A nature far more sympathetic than that of most authors has familiarised him with such subjects. In general, a certain apathy is characteristic of book-writers, and dulls the efficacy of their pathos. Mr. Dickens is quite exempt from this defect; but, on the other hand, is exceedingly prone to a very ostentatious exhibition of the opposite excellence. He dwells on dismal scenes with a kind of fawning fondness; and he seems unwilling to leave them, long after his readers have had more than enough of them. He describes Mr. Dennis the hangman[1] as having a professional fondness for his occupation: he has the same sort of fondness apparently for the profession of death-painter. The painful details he accumulates are a very serious drawback from the agreeableness of his writings. Dismal "light literature" is the dismallest of reading. The reality of the police reports is sufficiently bad, but a fictitious police report would be the most disagreeable of conceivable compositions. Some portions of Mr. Dickens's books are liable to a good many of the same objections. They are squalid from noisome trivialities, and horrid with terrifying crime. In his earlier books this is commonly relieved at frequent

[1] In *Barnaby Rudge*.

intervals by a graphic and original mirth. As, we will not say age, but maturity, has passed over his powers, this counteractive element has been lessened; the humour is not so happy as it was, but the wonderful fertility in painful *minutiæ* still remains.

Mr. Dickens's political opinions have subjected him to a good deal of criticism, and to some ridicule. He has shown, on many occasions, the desire—which we see so frequent among able and influential men—to start as a political reformer. Mr. Spurgeon said, with an application to himself: "If you've got the ear of the public, *of course* you must begin to tell it its faults". Mr. Dickens has been quite disposed to make this use of his popular influence. Even in *Pickwick* there are many traces of this tendency; and the way in which it shows itself in that book and in others is very characteristic of the time at which they appeared. The most instructive political characteristic of the years 1825 to 1845 is the growth and influence of the scheme of opinion which we call Radicalism. There are several species of creeds which are comprehended under this generic name, but they all evince a marked reaction against the worship of the English constitution and the affection for the English *status quo*, which were then the established creed and sentiment. All Radicals are Anti-Eldonites. This is equally true of the Benthamite or philosophical radicalism of the early period, and the Manchester, or "definite-grievance radicalism," among the last vestiges of which we are now living. Mr. Dickens represents a species different from either. His is what we may call the "sentimental radicalism"; and if we recur to the history of the time, we shall find that there would not originally have been any opprobrium attaching to such a name. The whole course of the legislation, and still more of the administration, of the first twenty years of the nineteenth century was marked by a

harsh unfeelingness which is of all faults the most contrary to any with which we are chargeable now. The world of the "Six Acts,"[1] of the frequent executions, of the Draconic criminal law, is so far removed from us that we cannot comprehend its having ever existed. It is more easy to understand the recoil which has followed. All the social speculation, and much of the social action of the few years succeeding the Reform Bill, bear the most marked traces of the reaction. The spirit which animates Mr. Dickens's political reasonings and observations expresses it exactly. The vice of the then existing social authorities, and of the then existing public, had been the forgetfulness of the pain which their own acts evidently produced,—an unrealising habit which adhered to official rules and established maxims, and which would not be shocked by the evident consequences, by proximate human suffering. The sure result of this habit was the excitement of the habit precisely opposed to it. Mr. Carlyle, in his *Chartism*, we think, observes of the poor-law reform: "It was then, above all things, necessary that outdoor relief should cease. But how? What means did great Nature take for accomplishing that most desirable end? She created a race of men who believed the cessation of outdoor relief to be the one thing needful." In the same way, and by the same propensity to exaggerated opposition which is inherent in human nature, the unfeeling obtuseness of the early part of this century was to be corrected by an extreme, perhaps an excessive, sensibility to human suffering in the years which have followed. There was most adequate reason for

[1] Of 23rd November, 3rd December, and 17th December, 1819; introduced by Eldon, Sidmouth and Castlereagh, to put down sedition, just after the Manchester massacre and the Cato Street conspiracy. (Forrest Morgan.)

the sentiment in its origin, and it had a great task to perform in ameliorating harsh customs and repealing dreadful penalties; but it has continued to repine at such evils long after they ceased to exist, and when the only facts that at all resemble them are the necessary painfulness of due punishment and the necessary rigidity of established law. Mr. Dickens is an example both of the proper use and of the abuse of the sentiment. His earlier works have many excellent descriptions of the abuses which had descended to the present generation from others whose sympathy with pain was less tender. Nothing can be better than the description of the poor debtors' gaol in *Pickwick*, or of the old parochial authorities in *Oliver Twist*. No doubt these descriptions are caricatures, all his delineations are so; but the beneficial use of such art can hardly be better exemplified. Human nature endures the aggravation of vices and foibles in written description better than that of excellences. We cannot bear to hear even the hero of a book for ever called "just"; we detest the recurring praise even of beauty, much more of virtue. The moment you begin to exaggerate a character of true excellence, you spoil it; the traits are too delicate not to be injured by heightening, or marred by over-emphasis. But a beadle is made for caricature. The slight measure of pomposity that humanises his unfeelingness introduces the requisite comic element; even the turnkeys of a debtors' prison may by skilful hands be similarly used. The contrast between the destitute condition of Job Trotter and Mr. Jingle and their former swindling triumph is made comic by a rarer touch of unconscious art. Mr. Pickwick's warm heart takes so eager an interest in the misery of his old enemies, that our colder nature is tempted to smile. We endure the over-intensity, at any rate the unnecessary aggravation, of the surrounding misery; and we endure it willingly, because it brings out

better than anything else could have done the half-comic intensity of a sympathetic nature.

It is painful to pass from these happy instances of well-used power to the glaring abuses of the same faculty in Mr. Dickens's later books. He began by describing really removable evils in a style which would induce all persons, however insensible, to remove them if they could; he has ended by describing the natural evils and inevitable pains of the present state of being, in such a manner as must tend to excite discontent and repining. The result is aggravated, because Mr. Dickens never ceases to hint that these evils are removable, though he does not say by what means. Nothing is easier than to show the evils of anything. Mr. Dickens has not unfrequently spoken, and, what is worse, he has taught a great number of parrot-like imitators to speak, in what really is, if they knew it, a tone of objection to the necessary constitution of human society. If you will only write a description of it, any form of government will seem ridiculous. What is more absurd than a despotism, even at its best? A king of ability or an able minister sits in an orderly room filled with memorials, and returns, and documents, and memoranda. These are his world; among these he of necessity lives and moves. Yet how little of the real life of the nation he governs can be represented in an official form! How much of real suffering is there that statistics can never tell! how much of obvious good is there that no memorandum to a minister will ever mention! how much deception is there in what such documents contain! how monstrous must be the ignorance of the closet statesman, after all his life of labour, of much that a ploughman could tell him of! A free government is almost worse, as it must read in a written delineation. Instead of the real attention of a laborious and anxious statesman, we have now the shifting caprices of a popular

assembly—elected for one object, deciding on another; changing with the turn of debate; shifting in its very composition; one set of men coming down to vote to-day, to-morrow another and often unlike set, most of them eager for the dinner-hour, actuated by unseen influences, by a respect for their constituents, by the dread of an attorney in a far-off borough. What people are these to control a nation's destinies, and wield the power of an empire, and regulate the happiness of millions! Either way we are at fault. Free government seems an absurdity, and despotism is so too. Again, every form of law has a distinct expression, a rigid procedure, customary rules and forms. It is administered by human beings liable to mistake, confusion, and forgetfulness, and in the long run, and on the average, is sure to be tainted with vice and fraud. Nothing can be easier than to make a case, as we may say, against any particular system, by pointing out with emphatic caricature its inevitable miscarriages, and by pointing out nothing else. Those who so address us may assume a tone of philanthropy, and for ever exult that they are not so unfeeling as other men are; but the real tendency of their exhortations is to make men dissatisfied with their inevitable condition, and, what is worse, to make them fancy that its irremediable evils can be remedied, and indulge in a succession of vague strivings and restless changes. Such, however—though in a style of expression somewhat different—is very much the tone with which Mr. Dickens and his followers have in later years made us familiar. To the second-hand repeaters of a cry so feeble, we can have nothing to say; if silly people cry because they think the world is silly, let them cry; but the founder of the school cannot, we are persuaded, peruse without mirth the lachrymose eloquence which his disciples have perpetrated. The soft moisture of irrelevant sentiment cannot have entirely entered into his soul. A truthful

genius must have forbidden it. Let us hope that his pernicious example may incite some one of equal genius to preach with equal efficiency a sterner and a wiser gospel; but there is no need just now for us to preach it without genius.

There has been much controversy about Mr. Dickens's taste. A great many cultivated people will scarcely concede that he has any taste at all; a still larger number of fervent admirers point, on the other hand, to a hundred felicitous descriptions and delineations which abound in apt expressions and skilful turns and happy images,—in which it would be impossible to alter a single word without altering for the worse; and naturally inquire whether such excellences in what is written do not indicate good taste in the writer. The truth is, that Mr. Dickens has what we may call creative taste; that is to say, the habit or faculty, whichever we may choose to call it, which at the critical instant of artistic production offers to the mind the right word, and the right word only. If he is engaged on a good subject for caricature, there will be no defect of taste to preclude the caricature from being excellent. But it is only in moments of imaginative production that he has any taste at all. His works nowhere indicate that he possesses in any degree the passive taste which decides what is good in the writings of other people, and what is not, and which performs the same critical duty upon a writer's own efforts when the confusing mists of productive imagination have passed away. Nor has Mr. Dickens the gentlemanly instinct which in many minds supplies the place of purely critical discernment, and which, by constant association with those who know what is best, acquires a second-hand perception of that which is best. He has no tendency to conventionalism for good or for evil; his merits are far removed from the ordinary path of writers, and it was not

probably so much effort to him as to other men to step so far out of that path: he scarcely knew how far it was. For the same reason, he cannot tell how faulty his writing will often be thought, for he cannot tell what people will think.

A few pedantic critics have regretted that Mr. Dickens had not received what they call a regular education. And if we understand their meaning, we believe they mean to regret that he had not received a course of discipline which would probably have impaired his powers. A regular education should mean that ordinary system of regulation and instruction which experience has shown to fit men best for the ordinary pursuits of life. It applies the requisite discipline to each faculty in the exact proportion in which that faculty is wanted in the pursuits of life; it develops understanding, and memory, and imagination, each in accordance with the scale prescribed. To men of ordinary faculties this is nearly essential; it is the only mode in which they can be fitted for the inevitable competition of existence. To men of regular and symmetrical genius also, such a training will often be beneficial. The world knows pretty well what are the great tasks of the human mind, and has learned in the course of ages with some accuracy what is the kind of culture likely to promote their exact performance. A man of abilities extraordinary in degree but harmonious in proportion will be the better for having submitted to the kind of discipline which has been ascertained to fit a man for the work to which powers in that proportion are best fitted; he will do what he has to do better and more gracefully; culture will add a touch to the finish of nature. But the case is very different with men of irregular and anomalous genius, whose excellences consist in the aggravation of some special faculty, or at the most one or two. The discipline which will fit such

a man for the production of great literary works is that which will most develop the peculiar powers in which he excels; the rest of the mind will be far less important; it will not be likely that the culture which is adapted to promote this special development will also be that which is most fitted for expanding the powers of common men in common directions. The precise problem is to develop the powers of a strange man in a strange direction. In the case of Mr. Dickens, it would have been absurd to have shut up his observant youth within the walls of a college. They would have taught him nothing about Mrs. Gamp there; Sam Weller took no degree. The kind of early life fitted to develop the power of apprehensive observation is a brooding life in stirring scenes; the idler in the streets of life knows the streets; the bystander knows the picturesque effect of life better than the player; and the meditative idler amid the hum of existence is much more likely to know its sound and to take in and comprehend its depths and meanings than the scholastic student intent on books, which, if they represent any world, represent one which has long passed away,—which commonly try rather to develop the reasoning understanding than the seeing observation,—which are written in languages that have long been dead. You will not train by such discipline a caricaturist of obvious manners.

Perhaps, too, a regular instruction and daily experience of the searching ridicule of critical associates would have detracted from the pluck which Mr. Dickens shows in all his writings. It requires a great deal of courage to be a humorous writer; you are always afraid that people will laugh at you instead of with you: undoubtedly there is a certain eccentricity about it. You take up the esteemed writers, Thucydides and the *Saturday Review;* after all, they do not make you laugh. It is not the function of

really artistic productions to contribute to the mirth of human beings. All sensible men are afraid of it, and it is only with an extreme effort that a printed joke attains to the perusal of the public: the chances are many to one that the anxious producer loses heart in the correction of the press, and that the world never laughs at all. Mr. Dickens is quite exempt from this weakness. He has what a Frenchman might call the courage of his faculty. The real daring which is shown in the *Pickwick Papers*, in the whole character of Mr. Weller senior, as well as in that of his son, is immense, far surpassing any which has been shown by any other contemporary writer. The brooding irregular mind is in its first stage prone to this sort of courage. It perhaps knows that its ideas are "out of the way"; but with the infantine simplicity of youth, it supposes that originality is an advantage. Persons more familiar with the ridicule of their equals in station (and this is to most men the great instructress of the college time) well know that of all qualities this one most requires to be clipped and pared and measured. Posterity, we doubt not, will be entirely perfect in every conceivable element of judgment; but the existing generation like what they have heard before—it is much easier. It required great courage in Mr. Dickens to write what his genius has compelled them to appreciate.

We have throughout spoken of Mr. Dickens as he was, rather than as he is; or, to use a less discourteous phrase, and we hope a truer, of his early works rather than of those which are more recent. We could not do otherwise consistently with the true code of criticism. A man of great genius, who has written great and enduring works, must be judged mainly by them; and not by the inferior productions which, from the necessities of personal position, a fatal facility of composition, or other cause, he may pour forth at moments less favourable to his powers. Those who

are called on to review these inferior productions themselves, must speak of them in the terms they may deserve; but those who have the more pleasant task of estimating as a whole the genius of the writer, may confine their attention almost wholly to those happier efforts which illustrate that genius. We should not like to have to speak in detail of Mr. Dickens's later works, and we have not done so. There are, indeed, peculiar reasons why a genius constituted as his is (at least if we are correct in the view which we have taken of it) would not endure without injury during a long life the applause of the many, the temptations of composition, and the general excitement of existence. Even in his earlier works it was impossible not to fancy that there was a weakness of fibre unfavourable to the longevity of excellence. This was the effect of his deficiency in those masculine faculties of which we have said so much, —the reasoning understanding and firm far-seeing sagacity. It is these two component elements which stiffen the mind, and give a consistency to the creed and a coherence to its effects,—which enable it to protect itself from the rush of circumstances. If to a deficiency in these we add an extreme sensibility to circumstances,—a mobility, as Lord Byron used to call it, of emotion, which is easily impressed, and still more easily carried away by impression,—we have the idea of a character peculiarly unfitted to bear the flux of time and chance. A man of very great determination could hardly bear up against them with such slight aids from within and with such peculiar sensibility to temptation. A man of merely ordinary determination would succumb to it; and Mr. Dickens has succumbed. His position was certainly unfavourable. He has told us that the works of his later years, inferior as all good critics have deemed them, have yet been more read than those of his earlier and healthier years. The most characteristic part of his

audience, the lower middle-class, were ready to receive with delight the least favourable productions of genius. Human nature cannot endure this; it is too much to have to endure a coincident temptation both from within and from without. Mr. Dickens was too much inclined by natural disposition to lachrymose eloquence and exaggerated caricature. Such was the kind of writing which he wrote most easily. He found likewise that such was the kind of writing that was read most readily; and of course he wrote that kind. Who would have done otherwise? No critic is entitled to speak very harshly of such degeneracy, if he is not sure that he could have coped with difficulties so peculiar. If that rule is to be observed, who is there that will not be silent? No other Englishman has attained such a hold on the vast populace; it is little, therefore, to say that no other has surmounted its attendant temptations.

JOHN MILTON.[1]

(1859.)

The *Life of Milton*, by Professor Masson, is a difficulty for the critics. It is very laborious, very learned, and in the main, we believe, very accurate. It is exceedingly long,—there are 780 pages in this volume, and there are to be two volumes more: it touches on very many subjects, and each of these has been investigated to the very best of the author's ability. No one can wish to speak with censure of a book on which so much genuine labour has been expended; and yet we are bound, as true critics, to say that we think it has been composed upon a principle that is utterly erroneous. In justice to ourselves we must explain our meaning.

There are two methods on which biography may consistently be written. The first of these is what we may call the exhaustive method. Every fact which is known about the hero may be told us; everything which he did, everything which he would not do, everything which other

[1] *The Life of John Milton, narrated in connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his time.* By David Masson, M.A., Professor of English Literature in University College, London. Cambridge: Macmillan.

An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton. By Thomas Keightley; with an Introduction to "Paradise Lost". London: Chapman and Hall.

The Poems of Milton, with Notes by Thomas Keightley. London: Chapman and Hall.

people did to him, everything which other people would not do to him,—may be narrated at full length. We may have a complete picture of all the events of his life; of all which he underwent, and all which he achieved. We may, as Mr. Carlyle expresses it, have a complete account "of his effect upon the universe, and of the effect of the universe upon him". We admit that biographies of this species would be very long and generally very tedious, we know that the world could not contain very many of them; but nevertheless the principle on which they may be written is intelligible.

The second method on which the life of a man may be written is the selective. Instead of telling everything, we may choose what we will tell. We may select out of the numberless events, from among the innumerable actions of his life, those events and those actions which exemplify his true character, which prove to us what were the true limits of his talents, what was the degree of his deficiencies, which were his defects, which his vices,—in a word, we may select the traits and the particulars which seem to give us the best idea of the man as he lived and as he was. On this side the flood, as Sydney Smith would have said, we should have fancied that this was the only practicable principle on which biographies can be written about persons of whom many details are recorded. For ancient heroes the exhaustive method is possible. All that can be known of them is contained in a few short passages of Greek and Latin, and it is quite possible to say whatever can be said about every one of these: the result would not be unreasonably bulky, though it might be dull. But in the case of men who have lived in the thick of the crowded modern world, no such course is admissible; overmuch *may* be said, and we must choose what we will say. Biographers, however, are rarely bold enough to adopt the selective method

consistently. They have, we suspect, the fear of the critics before their eyes. They do not like that it should be said that "the work of the learned gentleman contains serious omissions: the events of 1562 are not mentioned; those of October, 1579, are narrated but very cursorily": and we fear that in any case such remarks will be made. Very learned people are pleased to show that they know what is *not* in the book; sometimes they may hint that perhaps the author did not know it, or surely he would have mentioned it. But a biographer who wishes to write what most people of cultivation will be pleased to read must be courageous enough to face the pain of such censures. He must choose, as we have explained, the characteristic parts of his subject; and all that he has to take care of besides, is so to narrate them that their characteristic elements shall be shown: to give such an account of the general career as may make it clear what these chosen events really were; to show their respective bearings to one another; to delineate what is expressive in such a manner as to make it expressive.

This plan of biography is, however, by no means that of Mr. Masson. He has no dread of overgrown bulk and overwhelming copiousness. He finds, indeed, what we have called the exhaustive method insufficient. He not only wishes to narrate in full the life of Milton, but to add those of his contemporaries likewise: he seems to wish to tell us not only what Milton did, but also what every one else did in Great Britain during his lifetime. He intends his book to be not "merely a biography of Milton, but also in some sort a continuous history of his time. . . . The suggestions of Milton's life have indeed determined the tracks of these historical researches and expositions, sometimes through the literature of the period, sometimes through its civil and ecclesiastical politics; but the extent to which I have pursued them, and the space which I have

assigned to them, have been determined by my desire to present, by their combination, something like a connected historical view of British thought and British society in general prior to the Revolution." We need not do more than observe that this union of heterogeneous aims must always end, as it has in this case, in the production of a work at once overgrown and incomplete. A great deal which has only a slight bearing on the character of Milton is inserted; much that is necessary to a true history of "British thought and British society" is of necessity left out. The period of Milton's life which is included in the published volume makes the absurdity especially apparent. In middle life Milton was a great controversialist on contemporary topics; and though it would not be proper for a biographer to load his pages with a full account of all such controversies, yet some notice of the most characteristic of them would be expected from him. In this part of Milton's life some reference to public events would be necessary; and we should not severely censure a biographer, if the great interest of those events induced him to stray a little from his topic. But the first thirty years of Milton's life require a very different treatment. He passed those years in the ordinary musings of a studious and meditative youth; it was the period of "Lycidas" and of "Comus"; he then dreamed the

> "Sights which youthful poets dream
> On summer eve by haunted stream".[1]

We do not wish to have this part of his life disturbed, to a greater extent than may be necessary, with the harshness of public affairs. Nor is it necessary that it should be so disturbed. A life of poetic retirement requires but little reference to anything except itself. In a biography of Mr.

[1] "L'Allegro."

Tennyson we should not expect to hear of the Reform Bill, or the Corn Laws. Mr. Masson is, however, of a different opinion. He thinks it necessary to tell us, not only all which Milton did, but everything also that he might have heard of.

The biography of Mr. Keightley is on a very different scale. He tells the story of Milton's career in about half a small volume. Probably this is a little too concise, and the narrative is somewhat dry and bare. It is often, however, acute, and is always clear; and even were its defects greater than they are, we should think it unseemly to criticise the last work of one who has performed so many useful services to literature with extreme severity.

The bare outline of Milton's life is very well known. We have all heard that he was born in the latter years of King James, just when Puritanism was collecting its strength for the approaching struggle; that his father and mother were quiet good people, inclined, but not immoderately, to that persuasion; that he went up to Cambridge early, and had some kind of dissension with the authorities there; that the course of his youth was in a singular degree pure and staid; that in boyhood he was a devourer of books, and that he early became, and always remained, a severely studious man; that he married, and had difficulties of a peculiar character with his first wife; that he wrote on Divorce; that after the death of his first wife, he married a second time a lady who died very soon, and a third time a person who survived him more than fifty years; that he wrote early poems of singular beauty, which we still read; that he travelled in Italy, and exhibited his learning in the academies there; that he plunged deep in the theological and political controversies of his time; that he kept a school, or rather, in our more modern phrase, took pupils; that he was a republican of a peculiar kind, and of "no Church,"

which Dr. Johnson thought dangerous; that he was Secretary for Foreign Languages under the Long Parliament, and retained that office after the *coup d'état* of Cromwell; that he defended the death of Charles I., and became blind from writing a book in haste upon that subject; that after the Restoration he was naturally in a position of some danger and much difficulty; that in the midst of that difficulty he wrote "Paradise Lost"; that he did not fail in "heart or hope,"[1] but lived for fourteen years after the destruction of all for which he had laboured, in serene retirement, "though fallen on evil days, though fallen on evil times";—all this we have heard from our boyhood. How much is wanting to complete the picture—how many traits, both noble and painful, might be recovered from the past—we shall never know, till some biographer skilled in interpreting the details of human nature shall select this subject for his art.

All that we can hope to do in an essay like this is, to throw together some miscellaneous remarks on the character of the Puritan poet, and on the peculiarities of his works; and if in any part of them we may seem to make unusual criticisms, and to be over-ready with depreciation or objection, our excuse must be that we wish to paint a likeness, and that the harsher features of the subject should have a prominence, even in an outline.

There are two kinds of goodness conspicuous in the world, and often made the subject of contrast there; for which, however, we seem to want exact words, and which we are obliged to describe rather vaguely and incompletely. These characters may in one aspect be called the sensuous and the ascetic. The character of the first is that which is almost personified in the poet-king of Israel, whose actions and whose history have been "improved" so often by various writers, that it now seems trite even to allude to them.

[1] Sonnet xix.

Nevertheless, the particular virtues and the particular career of David seem to embody the idea of what may be called sensuous goodness far more completely than a living being in general comes near to an abstract idea. There may have been shades in the actual man which would have modified the resemblance; but in the portrait which has been handed down to us, the traits are perfect and the approximation exact. The principle of this character is its sensibility to outward stimulus; it is moved by all which occurs, stirred by all which happens, open to the influences of whatever it sees, hears, or meets with. The certain consequence of this mental constitution is a peculiar liability to temptation. Men are, according to the divine, "put upon their trial through the senses". It is through the constant suggestions of the outer world that our minds are stimulated, that our will has the chance of a choice, that moral life becomes possible. The sensibility to this external stimulus brings with it, when men have it to excess, an unusual access of moral difficulty. Everything acts on them, and everything has a chance of turning them aside; the most tempting things act upon them very deeply, and their influence, in consequence, is extreme. Naturally, therefore, the errors of such men are great. We need not point the moral—

> "Dizzied faith and guilt and woe,
> Loftiest aims by earth defiled,
> Gleams of wisdom sin-beguiled,
> Sated power's tyrannic mood,
> Counsels shared with men of blood,
> Sad success, parental tears,
> And a dreary gift of years".[1]

But, on the other hand, the excellence of such men has a charm, a kind of sensuous sweetness, that is its own.

[1] John Henry Newman's "Call of David".

Being conscious of frailty, they are tender to the imperfect; being sensitive to this world, they sympathise with the world; being familiar with all the moral incidents of life, their goodness has a richness and a complication: they fascinate their own age, and in their deaths they are "not divided" from the love of others. Their peculiar sensibility gives a depth to their religion; it is at once deeper and more human than that of other men. As their sympathetic knowledge of those whom they have seen is great, so it is with their knowledge of Him whom they have not seen; and as is their knowledge, so is their love; it is deep, from their nature; rich and intimate, from the variety of their experience; chastened by the ever-present sense of their weakness and of its consequences.

In extreme opposition to this is the ascetic species of goodness. This is not, as is sometimes believed, a self-produced ideal—a simply voluntary result of discipline and restraint. Some men have by nature what others have to elaborate by effort. Some men have a repulsion from the world. All of us have, in some degree, a protective instinct; an impulse, that is to say, to start back from what may trouble us, to shun what may fascinate us, to avoid what may tempt us. On the moral side of human nature this preventive check is occasionally imperious; it holds the whole man under its control,—makes him recoil from the world, be offended at its amusements, be repelled by its occupations, be scared by its sins. The consequences of this tendency, when it is thus in excess, upon the character are very great and very singular. It secludes a man in a sort of natural monastery; he lives in a kind of moral solitude; and the effects of his isolation for good and for evil on his disposition are very many. The best result is a singular capacity for meditative religion. Being aloof from what is earthly, such persons are shut up with what is

spiritual; being unstirred by the incidents of time, they are alone with the eternal; rejecting this life, they are alone with what is beyond. According to the measure of their minds, men of this removed and secluded excellence become eminent for a settled and brooding piety, for a strong and predominant religion. In human life too, in a thousand ways, their isolated excellence is apparent. They walk through the whole of it with an abstinence from sense, a zeal of morality, a purity of ideal, which other men have not. Their religion has an imaginative grandeur, and their life something of an unusual impeccability. And these are obviously singular excellences. But the deficiencies to which the same character tends are equally singular. In the first place, their isolation gives them a certain pride in themselves, and an inevitable ignorance of others. They are secluded by their constitutional δαίμων from life; they are repelled from the pursuits which others care for; they are alarmed at the amusements which others enjoy. In consequence, they trust in their own thoughts; they come to magnify both them and themselves—for being able to think and to retain them. The greater the nature of the man, the greater is this temptation. His thoughts are greater, and, in consequence, the greater is his tendency to prize them, the more extreme is his tendency to overrate them. This pride, too, goes side by side with a want of sympathy. Being aloof from others, such a mind is unlike others; and it feels, and sometimes it feels bitterly, its own unlikeness. Generally, however, it is too wrapt up in its own exalted thoughts to be sensible of the pain of moral isolation; it stands apart from others, unknowing and unknown. It is deprived of moral experience in two ways,—it is not tempted itself, and it does not comprehend the temptations of others. And this defect of moral experience is almost certain to produce two effects, one practical and the other speculative. When

such a man is wrong, he will be apt to believe that he is right. If his own judgment err, he will not have the habit of checking it by the judgment of others; he will be accustomed to think most men wrong; differing from them would be no proof of error, agreeing with them would rather be a basis for suspicion. He may, too, be very wrong, for the conscience of no man is perfect on all sides. The strangeness of secluded excellence will be sometimes deeply shaded by very strange errors. To be commonly above others, still more to think yourself above others, is to be below them every now and then, and sometimes much below. Again, on the speculative side, this defect of moral experience penetrates into the distinguishing excellence of the character,—its brooding and meditative religion. Those who see life under only one aspect, can see religion under only one likewise. This world is needful to interpret what is beyond; the seen must explain the unseen. It is from a tried and a varied and a troubled moral life that the deepest and truest idea of God arises. The ascetic character wants these; therefore in its religion there will be a harshness of outline, a bareness, so to say, as well as a grandeur. In life we may look for a singular purity; but also, and with equal probability, for singular self-confidence, a certain unsympathising straitness, and perhaps a few singular errors.

The character of the ascetic, or austere species of goodness, is almost exactly embodied in Milton. Men, indeed, are formed on no ideal type. Human nature has tendencies too various, and circumstances too complex. All men's characters have sides and aspects not to be comprehended in a single definition; but in this case, the extent to which the character of the man, as we find it delineated, approaches to the moral abstraction which we sketch from theory, is remarkable. The whole being of Milton may, in some

sort, be summed up in the great commandment of the austere character, "Reverence thyself". We find it expressed in almost every one of his singular descriptions of himself,—of those striking passages which are scattered through all his works, and which add to whatever interest may intrinsically belong to them one of the rarest of artistic charms, that of magnanimous autobiography. They have been quoted a thousand times, but one of them may perhaps be quoted again. "I had my time, readers, as others have, who have good learning bestowed upon them, to be sent to those places, where the opinion was it might be soonest attained; and as the manner is, was not unstudied in those authors which are most commended; whereof some were grave orators and historians, whose matter methought I loved indeed, but as my age then was, so I understood them; others were the smooth elegiac poets, whereof the schools are not scarce, whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing, which in imitation I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me, and for their matter, which what it is, there be few who know not, I was so allured to read, that no recreation came to me better welcome: for that it was then those years with me which are excused, though they be less severe, I may be saved the labour to remember ye. Whence having observed them to account it the chief glory of their wit, in that they were ablest to judge, to praise, and by that could esteem themselves worthiest to love those high perfections, which under one or other name they took to celebrate, I thought with myself by every instinct and presage of nature, which is not wont to be false, that what emboldened them to this task, might with such diligence as they used embolden me; and that what judgment, wit, or elegance was my share, would herein best appear, and best value itself, by how much more wisely,

and with more love of virtue I should choose (let rude ears be absent) the object of not unlike praises: for albeit these thoughts to some will seem virtuous and commendable, to others only pardonable, to a third sort perhaps idle; yet the mentioning of them now will end in serious. Nor blame it, readers, in those years to propose to themselves such a reward, as the noblest dispositions above other things in this life have sometimes preferred: whereof not to be sensible when good and fair in one person meet, argues both a gross and shallow judgment, and withal an ungentle and swainish breast. For by the firm settling of these persuasions, I became, to my best memory, so much a proficient, that if I found those authors anywhere speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled, this effect is wrought with me, from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored; and above them all, preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression. And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy."[1]

It may be fanciful to add, and we may be laughed at, but we believe that the self-reverencing propensity was a little aided by his singular personal beauty. All the describers of his youth concur in telling us that this was very remarkable. Mr. Masson has the following account of it:—

[1] *Apology for Smectymnuus.*

"When Milton left Cambridge in July, 1632, he was twenty-three years and eight months old. In stature, therefore, at least, he was already whatever he was to be. 'In stature,' he says himself at a latter period, when driven to speak on the subject, 'I confess I am not tall, but still of what is nearer to middle height than to little: and what if I were of little; of which stature have often been very great men both in peace and war—though why should that be called little which is great enough for virtue?' ('*Staturâ, fateor, non sum procerâ, sed quæ mediocri tamen quàm parvæ propior sit; sed quid si parvâ, quâ et summi sæpe tum pace tum bello viri fuere—quanquam parva cur dicitur, quæ ad virtutem satis magna est?*") This is precise enough; but we have Aubrey's words to the same effect: 'He was scarce so tall as I am,' says Aubrey; to which, to make it more intelligible, he appends the marginal note:—'*Qu. Quot* feet I am high? *Resp.* Of middle stature;'—*i.e.*, Milton was a little under middle height. 'He had light brown hair,' continues Aubrey,—putting the word 'abrown' ('auburn') in the margin by way of synonym for 'light brown';—'his complexion exceeding fair; oval face; his eye a dark grey.'"

We are far from accusing Milton of personal vanity. His character was too enormous, if we may be allowed so to say, for a fault so petty. But a little tinge of excessive self-respect will cling to those who can admire themselves. Ugly men are and ought to be ashamed of their existence. Milton was not so.

The peculiarities of the austere type of character stand out in Milton more remarkably than in other men who partake of it, because of the extreme strength of his nature. In reading him this is the first thing that strikes us. We seem to have left the little world of ordinary writers. The words of some authors are said to have "hands and feet"; they seem, that is, to have a vigour and animation which only belong to things which live and move. Milton's words have not this animal life. There is no rude energy about them. But, on the other hand, they have, or seem to have, a soul, a spirit which other words have not. He was early aware that what he wrote, "by certain vital signs it had,"

was such as the world would not "willingly let die".[1] After two centuries we feel the same. There is a solemn and firm music in the lines; a brooding sublimity haunts them; the spirit of the great writer moves over the face of the page. In life there seems to have been the same peculiar strength that his works suggest to us. His moral tenacity is amazing. He took his own course, and he kept his own course; and we may trace in his defects the same characteristics. "Energy and ill-temper," some say, "are the same thing;" and though this is a strong exaggeration, yet there is a basis of truth in it. People who labour much will be cross if they do not obtain that for which they labour; those who desire vehemently will be vexed if they do not obtain that which they desire. As is the strength of the impelling tendency, so, other things being equal, is the pain which it will experience if it be baffled. Those, too, who are set on what is high will be proportionately offended by the intrusion of what is low. Accordingly, Milton is described by those who knew him as a "harsh and choleric man". "He had," we are told, "a gravity in his temper, not melancholy, or not till the latter part of his life,—not sour, not morose, not ill-natured; but a certain severity of mind, not condescending to little things;"— and this, although his daughter remembered that he was delightful company, the life of conversation, and that he was so "on account of a flow of subjects and an unaffected cheerfulness and civility". Doubtless this may have been so when he was at ease, and at home. But there are unmistakable traces of the harsher tendency in almost all his works.

Some of the peculiarities of the ascetic character were likewise augmented by his studious disposition. This began very early in life, and continued till the end. "My father," he says, "destined me to the study of polite literature, which

[1] *Reason of Church Government*, Introduction to book iii.

I embraced with such avidity, that from the twelfth year of my age I hardly ever retired to rest from my studies till midnight; which was the first source of injury to my eyes, to the natural weakness of which were added frequent headaches: all of which not retarding my eagerness after knowledge, he took care to have me instructed,"[1] etc. Every page of his works shows the result of this education. In spite of the occupations of manhood, and the blindness and melancholy of old age, he still continued to have his principal pleasure in that "studious and select" reading, which, though often curiously transmuted, is perpetually involved in the very texture of his works. We need not stay to observe how a habit in itself so austere conduces to the development of an austere character. Deep study, especially deep study which haunts and rules the imagination, necessarily removes men from life, absorbs them in themselves; purifies their conduct, with some risk of isolating their sympathies; develops that loftiness of mood which is gifted with deep inspirations and indulged with great ideas, but which tends in its excess to engender a contempt for others, and a self-appreciation which is even more displeasing to them.

These same tendencies were aggravated also by two defects which are exceedingly rare in great English authors, and which perhaps Milton alone amongst those of the highest class is in a remarkable degree chargeable with. We mean a deficiency in humour, and a deficiency in a knowledge of plain human nature. Probably when, after the lapse of ages, English literature is looked at in its larger features only, and in comparison with other literatures which have preceded or which may follow it, the critics will lay down that its most striking characteristic as a whole is its involution, so to say, in life; the degree to which its

[1] *Defensio Secunda;* translated by Keightley.

book life resembles real life; the extent to which the motives, dispositions, and actions of common busy persons are represented in a medium which would seem likely to give us peculiarly the ideas of secluded, and the tendencies of meditative men. It is but an aspect of this fact, that English literature abounds,—some critics will say abounds excessively,—with humour. This is in some sense the imaginative element of ordinary life,—the relieving charm, partaking at once of contrast and similitude, which gives a human and an intellectual interest to the world of clowns and cottages, of fields and farmers. The degree to which Milton is deficient in this element is conspicuous in every page of his writings where its occurrence could be looked for; and if we do not always look for it, that is because the subjects of his most remarkable works are on a removed elevation, where ordinary life, the world of "cakes and ale," is never thought of and never expected. It is in his dramas, as we should expect, that Milton shows this deficiency the most. "Citizens" never talk in his pages, as they do in Shakespeare. We feel instinctively that Milton's eye had never rested with the same easy pleasure on the easy, ordinary, shop-keeping world. Perhaps, such is the complication of art, that it is on the most tragic occasions that we felt this want the most. It may seem an odd theory, and yet we believe it to be a true principle, that catastrophes require a comic element. We appear to feel the same principle in life. We may read solemn descriptions of great events in history,—say of Lord Strafford's trial, and of his marvellous speech, and his appeal to his "saint in heaven"; but we comprehend the whole transaction much better when we learn from Mr. Baillie, the eye-witness, that people ate nuts and apples, and talked, and laughed and betted on the great question of acquittal and condemnation. Nor is it difficult to understand why this should be so. It seems to be a law of

the imagination, at least in most men, that it will not bear concentration. It is essentially a glancing faculty. It goes and comes, and comes and goes, and we hardly know whence or why. But we most of us know that when we try to fix it, in a moment it passes away. Accordingly, the proper procedure of art is to let it go in such a manner as to ensure its coming back again. The force of artistic contrasts effects exactly this result. Skilfully disposed opposites suggest the notion of each other. We realise more perfectly and easily the great idea, the tragic conception, when we are familiarised with its effects on the minds of little people, —with the petty consequences which it causes, as well as with the enormous forces from which it comes. The catastrophe of Samson Agonistes discloses Milton's imperfect mastery of this element of effect. If ever there was an occasion which admitted its perfect employment, it was this. The kind of catastrophe is exactly that which is sure to strike and strike forcibly the minds of common persons. If their observations on the occasion were really given to us, we could scarcely avoid something rather comic. The eccentricity, so to speak, of ordinary persons, shows itself peculiarly at such times, and they say the queerest things. Shakespeare has exemplified this principle most skilfully on various occasions: it is the sort of art which is just in his way. His imagination always seems to be floating between the contrasts of things; and if his mind had a resting-place that it liked, it was this ordinary view of extraordinary events. Milton was under the great obligation to use this relieving principle of art in the catastrophe of Samson, because he has made every effort to heighten the strictly tragic element, which requires that relief. His art, always serious, was never more serious. His Samson is not the incarnation of physical strength which the popular fancy embodies in the character; nor is it the simple and romantic character of the

Old Testament. On the contrary, Samson has become a Puritan: the observations he makes would have done much credit to a religious pikeman in Cromwell's army. In consequence, his death requires some lightening touches to make it a properly artistic event. The pomp of seriousness becomes too oppressive.

"At length for intermission sake they led him
Between the pillars; he his guide requested
(For so from such as nearer stood we heard),
As over-tired, to let him lean a while
With both his arms on those two massy pillars
That to the archèd roof gave main support.
He unsuspicious led him; which when Samson
Felt in his arms, with head a while inclined,
And eyes fast fix'd, he stood, as one who pray'd,
Or some great matter in his mind revolved:
At last with head erect thus cry'd aloud,
'Hitherto, lords, what your commands imposed
I have perform'd, as reason was, obeying,
Not without wonder or delight beheld:
Now of my own accord such other trial
I mean to show you of my strength, yet greater,
As with amaze shall strike all who behold.'
This utter'd, straining all his nerves he bow'd,
As with the force of winds and waters pent
When mountains tremble, those two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro.
He tugg'd, he shook, till down they came, and drew
The whole roof after them, with bursts of thunder,
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath,—
Lords, ladies, captains, counsellors, or priests,
Their choice nobility and flower, not only
Of this, but each Philistian city round,
Met from all parts to solemnise this feast.
Samson with these immix'd, inevitably
Pull'd down the same destruction on himself;
The vulgar only 'scaped who stood without.
Chor. O dearly-bought revenge, yet glorious!
Living or dying thou hast fulfill'd

> The work for which thou wast foretold
> To Israel, and now ly'st victorious
> Among thy slain self-kill'd
> Not willingly, but tangled in the fold
> Of dire necessity, whose law in death conjoin'd
> Thee with thy slaughter'd foes, in number more
> Than all thy life hath slain before."

This is grave and fine; but Shakespeare would have done it differently and better.

We need not pause to observe how certainly this deficiency in humour and in the delineation of ordinary human feeling is connected with a recluse, a solitary, and to some extent an unsympathising life. If we combine a certain aloofness from common men with literary habits and an incessantly studious musing, we shall at once see how powerful a force is brought to bear on an instinctively austere character, and how sure it will be to develop the peculiar tendencies of it, both good and evil. It was to no purpose that Milton seems to have practised a sort of professional study of life. No man could rank more highly the importance to a poet of an intellectual insight into all-important pursuits and "seemly arts". But it is not by the mere intellect that we can take in the daily occupations of mankind; we must sympathise with them, and see them in their human relations. A chimney-sweeper, *quâ* chimney-sweeper, is not very sentimental; it is in himself that he is so interesting.

Milton's austere character is in some sort the more evident, because he possessed in large measure a certain relieving element, in which those who are eminent in that character are very deficient. Generally such persons have but obtuse senses. We are prone to attribute the purity of their conduct to the dulness of their sensations. Milton had no such obtuseness. He had every opportunity for

knowing "the world of eye and ear".[1] You cannot open his works without seeing how much he did know of it. The austerity of his nature was not caused by the deficiency of his senses, but by an excess of the warning instinct. Even when he professed to delineate the world of sensuous delight, this instinct shows itself. Dr. Johnson thought he could discern melancholy in "L'Allegro".[2] If he had said solitariness, it would have been correct.

The peculiar nature of Milton's character is very conspicuous in the events of his domestic life, and in the views which he took of the great public revolutions of his age. We can spare only a very brief space for the examination of either of these; but we will endeavour to say a few words upon each of them.

The circumstances of Milton's first marriage are as singular as any in the strange series of the loves of the poets. The scene opens with an affair of business. Milton's father, as is well known, was a scrivener, a kind of professional money-lender, then well known in London; and having been early connected with the vicinity of Oxford, continued afterwards to have pecuniary transactions of a certain nature with country gentlemen of that neighbourhood. In the course of these he advanced £500 to a certain Mr. Richard Powell, a squire of fair landed estate, residing at Forest Hill, which is about four miles from the city of Oxford. The money was lent on the 11th of June, 1627; and a few months afterwards Mr. Milton the elder gave £312 of it to his son the poet, who was then a youth at college, and made a formal memorandum of the same in the form then usual, which still exists. The debt was never wholly discharged; for in 1651 we find Milton declaring on oath that he had never received more than £180, "in part satisfaction of his said just and principal debt, with damages for the same

[1] Wordsworth: "Tintern Abbey". [2] *Life of Milton.*

and his costs of suit". Mr. Keightley supposes him to have "taken many a ride over to Forest Hill" after he left Cambridge and was living at Horton, which is not very far distant; but of course this is only conjecture. We only know that about 1643 "he took," as his nephew relates, "a journey into the country, nobody about him certainly knowing the reason, or that it was more than a journey of recreation. After a month's stay he returns a married man, who set out a bachelor; his wife being Mary, the eldest daughter of Mr. Richard Powell, then a justice of the peace" for the county of Oxford. The suddenness of the event is rather striking; but Philips was at the time one of Milton's pupils, and it is possible that some pains may have been taken to conceal the love-affair from the "young gentlemen". Still, as Philips was Milton's nephew, he was likely to hear such intelligence tolerably early; and as he does not seem to have done so, the *dénouement* was probably rather prompt. At any rate, he was certainly married at that time, and took his bride home to his house in Aldersgate Street; and there was feasting and gaiety according to the usual custom of such events. A few weeks after, the lady went home to her friends, in which there was of course nothing remarkable; but it is singular that when the natural limit of her visit at home was come, she absolutely refused to return to her husband. The grounds of so strange a resolution are very difficult to ascertain. Political feeling ran very high: old Mr. Powell adhered to the side of the king, and Milton to that of the Parliament; and this might be fancied to have caused an estrangement. But on the other hand, these circumstances must have been well known three months before. Nothing had happened in that quarter of a year to change very materially the position of the two parties in the State. Some other cause for Mrs. Milton's conduct must be looked for. She herself

is said to have stated that she did not like her husband's "spare diet and hard study".[1] No doubt, too, she found it dull in London; she had probably always lived in the country, and must have been quite unaccustomed to the not very pleasant scene in which she found herself. Still, many young ladies have married schoolmasters, and many young ladies have gone from Oxfordshire to London; and nevertheless, no such dissolution of matrimonial harmony is known to have occurred.

The fact we believe to be, that the bride took a dislike to her husband. We cannot but have a suspicion that she did not like him before marriage, and that pecuniary reasons had their influence. If, however, Mr. Powell exerted his paternal influence, it may be admitted that he had unusual considerations to advance in favour of the alliance he proposed. It is not every father whose creditors are handsome young gentlemen with fair incomes. Perhaps it seemed no extreme tyranny to press the young lady a little to do that which some others might have done without pressing. Still, all this is but hypothesis; our evidence as to the love-affairs of the time of King Charles I. is but meagre. But, whatever the feelings of Miss Powell may have been, those of Mrs. Milton are exceedingly certain. She would not return to her husband; she did not answer his letters; and a messenger whom he sent to bring her back was handled rather roughly. Unquestionably, she was deeply to blame, by far the most to blame of the two. Whatever may be alleged against him, is as nothing compared with her offence in leaving him. To defend so startling a course, we must adopt views of divorce even more extreme than those which Milton was himself driven to inculcate; and whatever Mrs. Milton's practice may have been, it may be fairly conjectured that her principles were strictly orthodox. Yet, if she could

[1] Philips.

be examined by a commission to the ghosts, she would probably have some palliating circumstances to allege in mitigation of judgment. There were, perhaps, peculiarities in Milton's character which a young lady might not improperly dislike. The austere and ascetic character is of course far less agreeable to women than the sensuous and susceptible. The self-occupation, the pride, the abstraction of the former are to the female mind disagreeable; studious habits and unusual self-denial seem to it purposeless; lofty enthusiasm, public spirit, the solitary pursuit of an elevated ideal, are quite out of its way: they rest too little on the visible world to be intelligible, they are too little suggested by the daily occurrences of life to seem possible. The poet in search of an imaginary phantom has never been successful with women; there are innumerable proofs of that; and the ascetic moralist is even less interesting. A character combined out of the two—and this to some extent was Milton's—is singularly likely to meet with painful failure; with a failure the more painful that it could never anticipate or explain it. Possibly he was absorbed in an austere self-conscious excellence; it may never have occurred to him that a lady might prefer the trivial detail of daily happiness.

Milton's own view of the matter he has explained to us in his book on divorce; and it is a very odd one. His complaint was, that his wife would not talk. What he wished in marriage was an "intimate and speaking help"; he encountered a "mute and spiritless mate". One of his principal incitements to the "pious necessity of divorcing," was an unusual deficiency in household conversation. A certain loquacity in their wives has been the complaint of various eminent men; but his domestic affliction was a different one. The "ready and reviving associate," whom he had hoped to have found, appeared to be a "coinhabiting mischief," who was sullen, and perhaps seemed bored and

tired. And at times he is disposed to cast the blame of his misfortune on the uninstructive nature of youthful virtue. The "soberest and best-governed men," he says, are least practised in such affairs, are not very well aware that "the bashful muteness" of a young lady "may oft-times hide the unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation"; and are rather in too great haste to light the nuptial torch: whereas those "who have lived most loosely, by reason of their bold accustoming, prove most successful in their matches; because their wild affections, unsettling at will, have been as so many divorces to teach them experience". And he rather wishes to infer that the virtuous man should, in case of mischance, have his resource of divorce likewise.

In truth, Milton's book on divorce—though only containing principles which he continued to believe long after he had any personal reasons for wishing to do so—was clearly suggested at first by the unusual phenomena of his first marriage. His wife began by not speaking to him, and finished by running away from him. Accordingly, like most books which spring out of personal circumstances, his treatises on this subject have a frankness, and a mastery of detail, which others on the same topic sometimes want. He is remarkably free from one peculiarity of modern writers on such matters. Several considerate gentlemen are extremely anxious for the "rights of women". They think that women will benefit by removing the bulwarks which the misguided experience of ages has erected for their protection. A migratory system of domestic existence might suit Madame Dudevant, and a few cases of singular exception; but we cannot fancy that it would be, after all, so much to the taste of most ladies as the present more permanent system. We have some reminiscence of the stories of the wolf and the lamb, when we hear amiable men

addressing a female auditory (in books, of course) on the advantages of a freer "development". We are perhaps wrong, but we cherish an indistinct suspicion that an indefinite extension of the power of selection would rather tend to the advantage of the sex which more usually chooses. But we have no occasion to avow such opinions now. Milton had no such modern views. He is frankly and honestly anxious for the rights of the man. Of the doctrine that divorce is only permitted for the help of wives, he exclaims: "Palpably uxorious! who can be ignorant that a woman was created for man, and not man for woman? What an injury is it after wedlock to be slighted! what to be contended with in point of house-rule who shall be the head; not for any parity of wisdom, for that were something reasonable, but out of a female pride! 'I suffer not,' saith St. Paul, 'the woman to usurp authority over the man.' If the Apostle could not suffer it," he naturally remarks, "into what mould is he mortified that can?" He had a sincere desire to preserve men from the society of unsocial and unsympathising women; and that was his principal idea.

His theory, to a certain extent, partakes of the same notion. The following passage contains a perspicuous exposition of it: "Moses, Deut. xxiv. 1, established a grave and prudent law, full of moral equity, full of due consideration towards nature, that cannot be resisted, a law consenting with the wisest men and civilest nations; that when a man hath married a wife, if it come to pass that he cannot love her by reason of some displeasing natural quality or unfitness in her, let him write her a bill of divorce. The intent of which law undoubtedly was this, that if any good and peaceable man should discover some helpless disagreement or dislike, either of mind or body, whereby he could not cheerfully perform the duty of a husband without the

perpetual dissembling of offence and disturbance to his spirit; rather than to live uncomfortably and unhappily both to himself and to his wife; rather than to continue undertaking a duty, which he could not possibly discharge, he might dismiss her, whom he could not tolerably, and so not conscionably, retain. And this law the Spirit of God by the mouth of Solomon, Prov. xxx. 21, 23, testifies to be a good and a necessary law, by granting it that 'a hated woman' (for so the Hebrew word signifies, rather than 'odious,' though it come all to one), that 'a hated woman, when she is married, is a thing that the earth cannot bear'." And he complains that the civil law of modern states interferes with the "domestical prerogative of the husband".

His notion would seem to have been that a husband was bound not to dismiss his wife, except for a reason really sufficient; such as a thoroughly incompatible temper, an incorrigible "muteness," and a desertion like that of Mrs. Milton. But he scarcely liked to admit that, in the use of this power, he should be subject to the correction of human tribunals. He thought that the circumstances of each case depended upon "utterless facts"; and that it was practically impossible for a civil court to decide on a subject so delicate in its essence, and so imperceptible in its data. But though amiable men doubtless suffer much from the deficiencies of their wives, we should hardly like to entrust them, in their own cases, with a jurisdiction so prompt and summary.

We are far from being concerned, however, just now with the doctrine of divorce on its intrinsic merits: we were only intending to give such an account of Milton's opinions upon it as might serve to illustrate his character. We think we have shown that it is possible there may have been, in his domestic relations, a little overweening pride; a tendency to overrate the true extent of masculine rights, and to dwell on his wife's duty to be social towards him

rather than on his duty to be social towards her,—to be rather sullen whenever she was not quite cheerful. Still, we are not defending a lady for leaving her husband for defects of such inferior magnitude. Few households would be kept together, if the right of transition were exercised on such trifling occasions. We are but suggesting that she may share the excuse which our great satirist has suggested for another unreliable lady: "My mother was an angel; but angels are not always *commodes à vivre*".

This is not a pleasant part of our subject, and we must leave it. It is more agreeable to relate that on no occasion of his life was the substantial excellence of Milton's character more conclusively shown, than in his conduct at the last stage of this curious transaction. After a very considerable interval, and after the publication of his book on divorce, Mrs. Milton showed a disposition to return to her husband; and, in spite of his theories, he received her with open arms. With great Christian patience, he received her relations too. The Parliamentary party was then victorious; and old Mr. Powell, who had suffered very much in the cause of the king, lived until his death untroubled, and "wholly to his devotion," as we are informed, in the house of his son-in-law.

Of the other occurrences of Milton's domestic life we have left ourselves no room to speak; we must turn to our second source of illustration for his character,—his opinions on the great public events of his time. It may seem odd, but we believe that a man of austere character naturally tends *both* to an excessive party spirit and to an extreme isolation. Of course the circumstances which develop the one must be different from those which are necessary to call out the other: party spirit requires companionship; isolation, if we may be pardoned so original a remark excludes it. But though, as we have shown, this species of

character is prone to mental solitude, tends to an intellectual isolation where it is possible and as soon as it can, yet when invincible circumstances throw it into mental companionship, when it is driven into earnest association with earnest men on interesting topics, its zeal becomes excessive. Such a man's mind is at home only with its own enthusiasm; it is cooped up within the narrow limits of its own ideas, and it can make no allowance for those who differ from or oppose them. We may see something of this excessive party zeal in Burke. No one's reasons are more philosophical; yet no one who acted with a party went further in aid of it or was more violent in support of it. He forgot what could be said for the tenets of the enemy; his imagination made that enemy an abstract incarnation of his tenets. A man, too, who knows that he formed his opinions originally by a genuine and intellectual process, is but little aware of the undue energy those ideas may obtain from the concurrence of those around. Persons who first acquired their ideas at second-hand are more open to a knowledge of their own weakness, and better acquainted with the strange force which there is in the sympathy of others. The isolated mind, when it acts with the popular feeling, is apt to exaggerate that feeling for the most part by an almost inevitable consequence of the feelings which render it isolated. Milton is an example of this remark. In the commencement of the struggle between Charles I. and the Parliament, he sympathised strongly with the popular movement, and carried to what seems now a strange extreme his partisanship. No one could imagine that the first literary Englishman of his time could write the following passage on Charles I.:—

"Who can with patience hear this filthy, rascally Fool speak so irreverently of Persons eminent both in Greatness and Piety? Dare you compare King *David* with King

Charles; a most Religious King and Prophet, with a Superstitious Prince, and who was but a Novice in the Christian Religion; a most prudent, wise Prince with a weak one; a valiant Prince with a cowardly one; finally, a most just Prince with a most unjust one? Have you the impudence to commend his Chastity and Sobriety, who is known to have committed all manner of Leudness in company with his Confident the Duke of *Buckingham?* It were to no purpose to inquire into the private Actions of his Life, who publickly at Plays would embrace and kiss the Ladies."[1]

Whatever may be the faults of that ill-fated monarch—and they assuredly were not small—no one would now think this absurd invective to be even an excusable exaggeration. It misses the true mark altogether, and is the expression of a strongly imaginative mind, which has seen something that it did not like, and is unable in consequence to see anything that has any relation to it distinctly or correctly. But with the supremacy of the Long Parliament Milton's attachment to their cause ceased. No one has drawn a more unfavourable picture of the rule which they established. Years after their supremacy had passed away, and the restoration of the monarchy had covered with a new and strange scene the old actors and the old world, he thrust into a most unlikely part of his *History of England* the following attack on them:—

"But when once the superficiall zeal and popular fumes that acted their New Magistracy were cool'd and spent in them, strait every one betook himself (setting the Commonwealth behind, his privat ends before) to doe as his own profit or ambition ledd him. Then was justice delay'd, and soon after deni'd: spight and favour determin'd all: hence faction, thence treachery, both at home and in the field:

[1] *Defence of the People of England*, chap. iv.

ev'ry where wrong, and oppression : foull and horrid deeds committed daily, or maintain'd, in secret, or in open. Som who had bin call'd from shops and warehouses, without other merit, to sit in Supreme Councills and Committees as thir breeding was, fell to huckster the Commonwealth. Others did therafter as men could soothe and humour them best; so hee who would give most, or, under covert of hypocriticall zeale, insinuat basest, enjoy'd unworthily the rewards of lerning and fidelity; or escap'd the punishment of his crimes and misdeeds. Thir Votes and Ordinances, which men looked should have contain'd the repealing of bad laws, and the immediat constitution of better, resounded with nothing els, but new Impositions, Taxes, Excises; yeerly, monthly, weekly. Not to reckon the Offices, Gifts, and Preferments bestow'd and shar'd among themselves."

His dislike of this system of committees, and of the generally dull and unemphatic administration of the Commonwealth, attached him to the Puritan army and to Cromwell; but in the continuation of the passage we have referred to, he expresses, with something, let it be said, of a schoolmaster feeling, an unfavourable judgment on their career.

"For *Britan*, to speak a truth not oft'n spok'n, as it is a Land fruitful enough of men stout and courageous in warr, soe it is naturally not over-fertill of men able to govern justly and prudently in peace, trusting onely in thir Motherwit; who consider not justly, that civility, prudence, love of the Publick good, more then of money or vaine honour, are to this soile in a manner outlandish; grow not here, but in mindes well implanted with solid and elaborat breeding, too impolitic els and rude, if not headstrong and intractable to the industry and vertue either of executing or understanding true Civill Government. Valiant indeed, and prosperous to win a field; but to know the end and

reason of winning, unjudicious, and unwise: in good or bad succes, alike unteachable. For the Sun, which wee want, ripens wits as well as fruits; and as Wine and Oil are imported to us from abroad, soe must ripe understanding, and many Civill Vertues, be imported into our mindes from Foren Writings, and examples of best Ages; we shall els miscarry still, and com short in the attempts of any great enterprize. Hence did thir Victories prove as fruitles, as thir Losses dang'rous; and left them still conq'ring under the same greevances, that Men suffer conquer'd: which was indeed unlikely to goe otherwise, unles Men more then vulgar bred up, as few of them were, in the knowledg of antient and illustrious deeds, invincible against many and vaine Titles, impartial to Freindships and Relations, had conducted thir Affairs: but then from the Chapman to the Retailer, many whose ignorance was more audacious then the rest, were admitted with all thir sordid Rudiments to bear no meane sway among them, both in Church and State."

We need not speak of Milton's disapprobation of the Restoration. Between him and the world of Charles II. the opposition was inevitable and infinite. Therefore the general fact remains, that except in the early struggles, when he exaggerated the popular feeling, he remained solitary in opinion, and had very little sympathy with any of the prevailing parties of his time.

Milton's own theory of government is to be learned from his works. He advocated a free commonwealth, without rule of a single person, or House of Lords: but the form of his projected commonwealth was peculiar. He thought that a certain perpetual council, which should be elected by the nation once for all, and the number of which should be filled up as vacancies might occur, was the best possible machine of government. He did not

confine his advocacy to abstract theory, but proposed the immediate establishment of such a council in this country. We need not go into an elaborate discussion to show the errors of this conclusion. Hardly any one, then or since, has probably adopted it. The interest of the theoretical parts of Milton's political works is entirely historical. The tenets advocated are not of great value, and the arguments by which he supports them are perhaps of less; but their relation to the times in which they were written gives them a very singular interest. The time of the Commonwealth was the only period in English history in which the fundamental questions of government have been thrown open for popular discussion in this country. We read in French literature discussions on the advisability of establishing a monarchy, on the advisability of establishing a republic, on the advisability of establishing an empire; and, before we proceed to examine the arguments, we cannot help being struck at the strange contrast which this multiplicity of open questions presents to our own uninquiring acquiescence in the hereditary polity which has descended to us. "King, Lords, and Commons" are, we think, ordinances of nature. Yet Milton's political writings embody the reflections of a period when, for a few years, the government of England was nearly as much a subject of fundamental discussion as that of France was in 1851. An "invitation to thinkers," to borrow the phrase of Neckar, was given by the circumstances of the time; and, with the habitual facility of philosophical speculation, it was accepted, and used to the utmost.

Such are not the kind of speculations in which we expect assistance from Milton. It is not in its transactions with others, in its dealings with the manifold world, that the isolated and austere mind shows itself to the most advantage. Its strength lies in itself. It has "a calm and pleasing

solitariness". It hears thoughts which others cannot hear. It enjoys the quiet and still air of delightful studies; and is ever conscious of such musing and poetry "as is not to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her twin daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His Seraphim with the hallowed fire of His altar".

"Descend from Heav'n, Urania, by that name
If rightly thou art call'd, whose voice divine
Following, above th' Olympian hill I soar,
Above the flight of Pegaséan wing.
The meaning, not the name, I call; for thou
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
Of old Olympus dwell'st, but heav'nly born:
Before the hills appear'd, or fountain flow'd,
Thou with eternal Wisdom didst converse,
Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
In presence of th' Almighty Father, pleased
With thy celestial song. Up led by thee
Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presumed,
An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,
Thy temp'ring. With like safety guided down,
Return me to my native element;
Lest from this flying steed, unrein'd (as once
Bellerophon, though from a lower clime),
Dismounted, on th' Aleian field I fall
Erroneous there to wander and forlorn.
Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound
Within the visible diurnal sphere;
Standing on earth, not rapt above the pole,
More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days,
On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn
Purples the east: still govern thou my song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few;

> But drive far off the barb'rous dissonance
> Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race
> Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard
> In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears
> To rapture, till the savage clamour drown'd
> Both harp and voice; nor could the Muse defend
> Her son. So fail not thou, who thee implores;
> For thou art heav'nly, she an empty dream."[1]

"An ancient clergyman of Dorsetshire, Dr. Wright, found John Milton in a small chamber hung with rusty green, sitting in an elbow-chair, and dressed neatly in black: pale, but not cadaverous." "He used also to sit in a grey coarse cloth coat at the door of his house near Bunhill Fields, in warm, sunny weather;"[2] and the common people said he was inspired.

If from the man we turn to his works, we are struck at once with two singular contrasts. The first of them is this. The distinction between ancient and modern art is sometimes said, and perhaps truly, to consist in the simple bareness of the imaginative conceptions which we find in ancient art, and the comparatively complex clothing in which all modern creations are embodied. If we adopt this distinction, Milton seems in some sort ancient, and in some sort modern. Nothing is so simple as the subject-matter of his works. The two greatest of his creations, the character of Satan and the character of Eve, are two of the simplest — the latter probably the very simplest — in the whole field of literature. On this side Milton's art is classical. On the other hand, in no writer is the imagery more profuse, the illustrations more various, the dress altogether more splendid. And in this respect the style of his art seems romantic and modern. In real truth, however, it is only ancient art in a modern disguise. The

[1] "Paradise Lost," book vii. [2] Richardson.

dress is a mere dress, and can be stripped off when we will. We all of us do perhaps in memory strip it off ourselves. Notwithstanding the lavish adornments with which her image is presented, the character of Eve is still the simplest sort of feminine essence — the pure embodiment of that inner nature, which we believe and hope that women have. The character of Satan, though it is not so easily described, has nearly as few elements in it. The most purely modern conceptions will not bear to be unclothed in this matter. Their romantic garment clings inseparably to them. Hamlet and Lear are not to be thought of except as complex characters, with very involved and complicated embodiments. They are as difficult to draw out in words as the common characters of life are; that of Hamlet, perhaps, is more so. If we make it, as perhaps we should, the characteristic of modern and romantic art that it presents us with creations which we cannot think of or delineate except as very varied, and, so to say, circumstantial, we must not rank Milton among the masters of romantic art. And without involving the subject in the troubled sea of an old controversy, we may say that the most striking of the poetical peculiarities of Milton is the bare simplicity of his ideas, and the rich abundance of his illustrations.

Another of his peculiarities is equally striking. There seems to be such a thing as second-hand poetry. Some poets, musing on the poetry of other men, have unconsciously shaped it into something of their own: the new conception is like the original, it would never probably have existed had not the original existed previously; still it is sufficiently different from the original to be a new thing, not a copy or a plagiarism; it is a creation, though, so to say, a suggested creation. Gray is as good an example as can be found of a poet whose works abound in this

species of semi-original conceptions. Industrious critics track his best lines back, and find others like them which doubtless lingered near his fancy while he was writing them. The same critics have been equally busy with the works of Milton, and equally successful. They find traces of his reading in half his works; not, which any reader could do, in overt similes and distinct illustrations, but also in the very texture of the thought and the expression. In many cases, doubtless, they discover more than he himself knew. A mind like his, which has an immense store of imaginative recollections, can never know which of his own imaginations is exactly suggested by which recollection. Men awake with their best ideas; it is seldom worth while to investigate very curiously whence they came. Our proper business is to adapt, and mould, and act upon them. Of poets perhaps this is true even more remarkably than of other men; their ideas are suggested in modes, and according to laws, which are even more impossible to specify than the ideas of the rest of the world. Second-hand poetry, so to say, often seems quite original to the poet himself; he frequently does not know that he derived it from an old memory; years afterwards it may strike him as it does others. Still, in general, such inferior species of creation is not so likely to be found in minds of singular originality as in those of less. A brooding, placid, cultivated mind, like that of Gray, is the place where we should expect to meet with it. Great originality disturbs the adaptive process, removes the mind of the poet from the thoughts of other men, and occupies it with its own heated and flashing thoughts. Poetry of the second degree is like the secondary rocks of modern geology—a still, gentle, alluvial formation; the igneous glow of primary genius brings forth ideas like the primeval granite, simple, astounding, and alone. Milton's case is an exception to

this rule. His mind has marked originality, probably as much of it as any in literature; but it has as much of moulded recollection as any mind too. His poetry in consequence is like an artificial park, green, and soft, and beautiful, yet with outlines bold, distinct, and firm, and the eternal rock ever jutting out; or, better still, it is like our own Lake scenery, where Nature has herself the same combination—where we have Rydal Water side by side with the everlasting upheaved mountain. Milton has the same union of softened beauty with unimpaired grandeur; and it is his peculiarity.

These are the two contrasts which puzzle us at first in Milton, and which distinguish him from other poets in our remembrance afterwards. We have a superficial complexity in illustration, and imagery, and metaphor; and in contrast with it we observe a latent simplicity of idea, an almost rude strength of conception. The underlying thoughts are few, though the flowers on the surface are so many. We have likewise the perpetual contrast of the soft poetry of the memory, and the firm, as it were fused, and glowing poetry of the imagination. His words, we may half fancifully say, are like his character. There is the same austerity in the real essence, the same exquisiteness of sense, the same delicacy of form which we know that he had, the same music which we imagine there was in his voice. In both his character and his poetry there was an ascetic nature in a sheath of beauty.

No book perhaps which has ever been written is more difficult to criticise than "Paradise Lost". The only way to criticise a work of the imagination, is to describe its effect upon the mind of the reader—at any rate, of the critic; and this can only be adequately delineated by strong illustrations, apt similes, and perhaps a little exaggeration. The task is in its very nature not an easy one; the poet paints a picture

on the fancy of the critic, and the critic has in some sort to copy it on the paper. He must say what it is before he can make remarks upon it. But in the case of "Paradise Lost" we hardly like to use illustrations. The subject is one which the imagination rather shrinks from. At any rate, it requires courage, and an effort to compel the mind to view such a subject as distinctly and vividly as it views other subjects. Another peculiarity of "Paradise Lost" makes the difficulty even greater. It does not profess to be a mere work of art; or rather, it claims to be by no means that, and that only. It starts with a dogmatic aim; it avowedly intends to

> "assert eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to man".

In this point of view we have always had a sympathy with the Cambridge mathematician who has been so much abused. He said, "After all, 'Paradise Lost' *proves* nothing"; and various persons of poetical tastes and temperament have been very severe on the prosaic observation. Yet, "after all," he was right. Milton professed to prove something. He was too profound a critic—rather, he had too profound an instinct of those eternal principles of art which criticism tries to state—not to know that on such a subject he must prove something. He professed to deal with the great problem of human destiny; to show why man was created, in what kind of universe he lives, whence he came, and whither he goes. He dealt of necessity with the greatest of subjects. He had to sketch the greatest of objects. He was concerned with infinity and eternity even more than with time and sense; he undertook to delineate the ways, and consequently the character of Providence, as well as the conduct and the tendencies of man. The essence of success in such an attempt is to satisfy the religious sense of man; to bring home to our hearts what we know to be

true; to teach us what we have not seen; to awaken us to what we have forgotten; to remove the "covering" from all people, and the "veil" that is spread over all nations; to give us, in a word, such a conception of things divine and human as we can accept, believe and trust. The true doctrine of criticism demands what Milton invites—an examination of the degree in which the great epic attains this aim. And if, in examining it, we find it necessary to use unusual illustrations, and plainer words than are customary, it must be our excuse that we do not think the subject can be made clear without them.

The defect of "Paradise Lost" is that, after all, it is founded on a *political* transaction. The scene is in heaven very early in the history of the universe, before the creation of man or the fall of Satan. We have a description of a court. The angels,

> "By imperial summons called,"

appear

> "Under their hierarchs in orders bright:
> Ten thousand thousand ensigns high advanced,
> Standards and gonfalons 'twixt van and rear
> Stream in the air, and for distinction serve
> Of hierarchies, and orders, and degrees".

To this assemblage "th' Omnipotent" speaks:—

> "Hear, all ye Angels, progeny of light,
> Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Pow'rs,
> Hear my decree, which unrevoked shall stand:
> This day I have begot whom I declare
> My only Son; and on this holy hill
> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
> And by myself have sworn, to him shall bow
> All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:
> Under his great vicegerent reign abide

United as one individual soul
For ever happy. Him who disobeys,
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day,
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Int' utter darkness, deep ingulph'd, his place
Ordain'd without redemption, without end."

This act of patronage was not popular at court; and why should it have been? The religious sense is against it. The worship which sinful men owe to God is not transferable to lieutenants and vicegerents. The whole scene of the court jars upon a true feeling. We seem to be reading about some emperor of history, who admits his son to a share in the empire, who confers on him a considerable jurisdiction, and requires officials, with "standards and gonfalons," to bow before him. The orthodoxy of Milton is quite as questionable as his accuracy. The old Athanasian creed was not made by persons who would allow such a picture as that of Milton to stand before their imaginations. The generation of the Son was to them a fact "before all time"; an eternal fact. There was no question in their minds of patronage or promotion. The Son was the Son before all time, just as the Father was the Father before all time. Milton had in such matters a bold but not very sensitive imagination. He accepted the inevitable materialism of biblical, and, to some extent, of all religious language as distinct revelation. He certainly believed, in contradiction to the old creed, that God had both "parts and passions". He imagined that earth

"Is but the shadow of heaven and things therein,
Each to other like more than on earth is thought".[1]

From some passages it would seem that he actually thought of God as having "the members and form" of a man.

[1] Book v., "Raphael to Adam".

Naturally, therefore, he would have no toleration for the mysterious notions of time and eternity which are involved in the traditional doctrine. We are not, however, now concerned with Milton's belief, but with his representation of his creed—his picture, so to say, of it in "Paradise Lost"; still, as we cannot but think, that picture is almost irreligious, and certainly different from that which has been generally accepted in Christendom. Such phrases as "before all time," "eternal generation," are doubtless very vaguely interpreted by the mass of men; nevertheless, no sensitively orthodox man *could* have drawn the picture of a generation, not to say an exaltation, *in* time.

We shall see this more clearly by reading what follows in the poem:—

> "All seemed well pleased; all seemed, but were not all".

One of the archangels, whose name can be guessed, decidedly disapproved, and calls a meeting, at which he explains that

> "orders and degrees
> Jar not with liberty, but well consist";

but still, that the promotion of a new person, on grounds of relationship merely, above, even infinitely above, the old angels, with imperial titles, was "a new law," and rather tyrannical. Abdiel,

> "than whom none with more zeal adored
> The Deity, and with divine commands obeyed,"

attempts a defence:

> "Grant it thee unjust,
> That equal over equals monarch reign:
> Thyself, though great and glorious, dost thou count,
> Or all angelic nature join'd in one,
> Equal to him begotten Son? by whom
> As by his Word the mighty Father made
> All things, ev'n thee; and all the Spirits of Heav'n

By him created in their bright degrees,
Crown'd them with glory, and to their glory named
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Pow'rs,
Essential Pow'rs; nor by his reign obscured,
But more illustrious made; since he the Head,
One of our number thus reduced becomes;
His laws our laws; all honour to him done
Returns our own. Cease then this impious rage,
And tempt not these; but hasten to appease
Th' incensed Father and th' incensed Son,
While pardon may be found, in time besought."

Yet though Abdiel's intentions were undeniably good, his argument is rather specious. Acting as an instrument in the process of creation would scarcely give a valid claim to the obedience of the created being. Power may be shown in the act, no doubt; but mere power gives no true claim to the obedience of moral beings. It is a kind of principle of all manner of idolatries and false religions to believe that it does so. Satan, besides, takes issue on the fact:

"That we were formed then, say'st thou? and the work
Of secondary hands, by task transferr'd
From Father to his Son? Strange point and new!
Doctrine which we would know whence learned."

And we must say that the speech in which the new ruler is introduced to the "thrones, dominations, princedoms. powers," is hard to reconcile with Abdiel's exposition, "*This day*" he seems to have come into existence, and could hardly have assisted at the creation of the angels, who are not young, and who converse with one another like old acquaintances.

We have gone into this part of the subject at length, because it is the source of the great error which pervades "Paradise Lost". Satan is made *interesting*. This has been the charge of a thousand orthodox and even heterodox

writers against Milton. Shelley, on the other hand, has gloried in it; and fancied, if we remember rightly, that Milton intentionally ranged himself on the Satanic side of the universe, just as Shelley himself would have done, and that he wished to show the falsity of the ordinary theology. But Milton was born an age too early for such aims, and was far too sincere to have advocated any doctrine in a form so indirect. He believed every word he said. He was not conscious of the effect his teaching would produce in an age like this, when scepticism is in the air, and when it is not possible to help looking coolly on his delineations. Probably in our boyhood we can recollect a period when any solemn description of celestial events would have commanded our respect; we should not have dared to read it intelligently, to canvass its details and see what it meant: it was a religious book; it sounded reverential, and that would have sufficed. Something like this was the state of mind of the seventeenth century. Even Milton probably shared in a vague reverence for religious language. He hardly felt the moral effect of the pictures he was drawing. His artistic instinct too, often hurries him away. His Satan was to him, as to us, the hero of his poem. Having commenced by making him resist on an occasion which in an earthly kingdom would have been excusable and proper, he probably a little sympathised with him, just as his readers do.

The interest of Satan's character is at its height in the first two books. Coleridge justly compared it to that of Napoleon. There is the same pride, the same Satanic ability, the same will, the same egotism. His character seems to grow with his position. He is far finer after his fall, in misery and suffering, with scarcely any resource except in himself, than he was originally in heaven; at least, if Raphael's description of him can be trusted. No portrait which imagination or history has drawn of a revolu-

tionary anarch is nearly so perfect; there is all the grandeur of the greatest human mind, and certain infinitude in his circumstances which humanity must ever want. Few Englishmen feel a profound reverence for Napoleon I. There was no French alliance in *his* time; we have most of us some tradition of antipathy to him. Yet hardly any Englishman can read the account of the campaign of 1814 without feeling his interest in the emperor to be strong, and without perhaps being conscious of a latent wish that he may succeed. Our opinion is against him, our serious wish is of course for England; but the imagination has a sympathy of its own, and will not give place. We read about the great general—never greater than in that last emergency—showing resources of genius that seem almost infinite, and that assuredly have never been surpassed, yet vanquished, yielding to the power of circumstances, to the combined force of adversaries, each of whom singly he outmatches in strength, and all of whom together he surpasses in majesty and in mind. Something of the same sort of interest belongs to the Satan of the first two books of "Paradise Lost". We know that he will be vanquished; his name is not a recommendation. Still we do not imagine distinctly the minds by which he is to be vanquished; we do not take the same interest in them that we do in him; our sympathies, our fancy, are on his side.

Perhaps much of this was inevitable; yet what a defect it is! especially what a defect in Milton's own view, and looked at with the stern realism with which he regarded it! Suppose that the author of evil in the universe were the most attractive being in it; suppose that the source of all sin were the origin of all interest to us! We need not dwell upon this.

As we have said, much of this was difficult to avoid, if indeed it could be avoided, in dealing with such a theme,

Even Milton shrank, in some measure, from delineating the Divine character. His imagination evidently halts when it is required to perform that task. The more delicate imagination of our modern world would shrink still more. Any person who will consider what such an attempt must end in, will find his nerves quiver. But by a curiously fatal error, Milton has selected for delineation exactly that part of the Divine nature which is most beyond the reach of the human faculties, and which is also, when we try to describe our fancy of it, the least effective to our minds. He has made God *argue*. Now the procedure of the Divine mind from truth to truth must ever be incomprehensible to us; the notion, indeed, of His proceeding at all, is a contradiction: to some extent, at least, it is inevitable that we should use such language, but we know it is in reality inapplicable. A long train of reasoning in such a connection is so out of place as to be painful; and yet Milton has many. He relates a series of family prayers in heaven, with sermons afterwards, which are very tedious. Even Pope was shocked at the notion of Providence talking like "a school-divine".[1] And there is the still worse error, that if you once attribute reasoning to Him, subsequent logicians may discover that He does not reason very well.

Another way in which Milton has contrived to strengthen our interest in Satan, is the number and insipidity of the good angels. There are old rules as to the necessity of a supernatural machinery for an epic poem, worth some fraction of the paper on which they are written, and derived from the practice of Homer, who believed his gods and goddesses to be real beings, and would have been rather harsh with a critic who called them machinery. These rules had probably an influence with Milton, and induced him to manipulate those serious angels more than he would

[1] Imitation of Horace's Epistle to Augustus, book ii., ep. 1.

have done otherwise. They appear to be excellent administrators with very little to do; a kind of grand chamberlains with wings, who fly down to earth and communicate information to Adam and Eve. They have no character; they are essentially messengers, merely conductors, so to say, of the providential will: no one fancies that they have an independent power of action; they seem scarcely to have minds of their own. No effect can be more unfortunate. If the struggle of Satan had been with Deity directly, the natural instincts of religion would have been awakened; but when an angel possessed of mind is contrasted with angels possessed only of wings, we sympathise with the former.

In the first two books, therefore, our sympathy with Milton's Satan is great; we had almost said unqualified. The speeches he delivers are of well-known excellence. Lord Brougham, no contemptible judge of emphatic oratory, has laid down, that if a person had not an opportunity of access to the great Attic masterpieces, he had better choose these for a model. What is to be regretted about the orator is, that he scarcely acts up to his sentiments. "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven," is, at any rate, an audacious declaration. But he has no room for exhibiting similar audacity in action. His offensive career is limited. In the nature of the subject there was scarcely any opportunity for the fallen archangel to display in the detail of his operations the surpassing intellect with which Milton has endowed him. He goes across chaos, gets into a few physical difficulties; but these are not much. His grand aim is the conquest of our first parents; and we are at once struck with the enormous inequality of the conflict. Two beings just created, without experience, without guile, without knowledge of good and evil, are expected to contend with a being on the delineation of whose powers every resource of art and imagination, every subtle suggestion,

every emphatic simile, has been lavished. The idea in every reader's mind is, and must be, not surprise that our first parents should yield, but wonder that Satan should not think it beneath him to attack them. It is as if an army should invest a cottage.

We have spoken more of theology than we intended; and we need not say how much the monstrous inequalities attributed to the combatants affect our estimate of the results of the conflict. The state of man is what it is, because the defenceless Adam and Eve of Milton's imagination yielded to the nearly all-powerful Satan whom he has delineated. Milton has in some sense invented this difficulty; for in the book of Genesis there is no such inequality. The serpent may be subtler than any beast of the field; but he is not necessarily subtler or cleverer than man. So far from Milton having justified the ways of God to man, he has loaded the common theology with a new encumbrance.

We may need refreshment after this discussion; and we cannot find it better than in reading a few remarks of Eve.

> "That day I oft remember, when from sleep
> I first awaked, and found myself reposed
> Under a shade of flow'rs, much wond'ring where
> And what I was, whence hither brought, and how.
> Not distant far from thence a murm'ring sound
> Of waters issued from a cave, and spread
> Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved
> Pure as th' expanse of Heav'n. . . . I thither went
> With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
> On the green bank, to look into the clear
> Smooth lake, that to me seem'd another sky.
> As I bent down to look, just opposite
> A shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd,
> Bending to look on me. I started back;
> It started back: but pleased I soon return'd;
> Pleased it return'd as soon with answ'ring looks
> Of sympathy and love; there I had fix'd

Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warn'd me. What thou seest,
What there thou seest, fair Creature, is thyself;
With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he
Whose image thou art; him thou shalt enjoy
Inseparably thine: to him shalt bear
Multitudes like thyself, and thence be call'd
Mother of Human Race. What could I do
But follow straight, invisibly thus led?
Till I espy'd thee, fair indeed and tall
Under a platan; yet me thought less fair,
Less winning soft, less amiably mild,
Than that smooth wat'ry image. Back I turn'd:
Thou following cry'dst aloud, Return, fair Eve;
Whom fly'st thou?"[1]

Eve's character, indeed, is one of the most wonderful efforts of the human imagination. She is a kind of abstract woman; essentially a typical being; and official "mother of all living". Yet she is a real interesting woman, not only full of delicacy and sweetness, but with all the undefinable fascination, the charm of personality, which such typical characters hardly ever have. By what consummate miracle of wit this charm of individuality is preserved, without impairing the general idea which is ever present to us, we cannot explain, for we do not know.

Adam is far less successful. He has good hair,—"hyacinthine locks" that "from his parted forelock manly hung"; a "fair large front" and "eye sublime"; but he has little else that we care for. There is, in truth, no opportunity of displaying manly virtues, even if he possessed them. He has only to yield to his wife's solicitations, which he does. Nor are we sure that he does it well. He is very tedious; he indulges in sermons which are good;

[1] Book iv.

but most men cannot but fear that so delightful a being as Eve must have found him tiresome. She steps away, however, and goes to sleep at some of the worst points.

Dr. Johnson remarked, that, after all, "Paradise Lost" was one of the books which no one wished longer: we fear, in this irreverent generation, some wish it shorter. Hardly any reader would be sorry if some portions of the later books had been spared him. Coleridge, indeed, discovered profound mysteries in the last; but in what could not Coleridge find a mystery if he wished? Dryden more wisely remarked that Milton became tedious when he entered upon a "tract of Scripture".[1] Nor is it surprising that such is the case. The style of many parts of Scripture is such that it will not bear addition or subtraction. A word less, or an idea more, and the effect upon the mind is the same no longer. Nothing can be more tiresome than a sermonic amplification of such passages. It is almost too much when, as from the pulpit, a paraphrastic commentary is prepared for our spiritual improvement. In deference to the intention we bear it, but we bear it unwillingly; and we cannot endure it at all when, as in poems, the object is to awaken our fancy rather than to improve our conduct. The account of the creation in the book of Genesis is one of the compositions from which no sensitive imagination would subtract an iota, to which it could not bear to add a word. Milton's paraphrase is alike copious and ineffective. The universe is, in railway phrase, "opened," but not created; no green earth springs in a moment from the indefinite void. Instead, too, of the simple loneliness of the Old Testament, several angelic officials are in attendance, who help in nothing, but indicate that heaven must be plentifully supplied with tame creatures.

There is no difficulty in writing such criticisms, and,

[1] "Essay on Satire."

indeed, other unfavourable criticisms on "Paradise Lost". There is scarcely any book in the world which is open to a greater number, or which a reader who allows plain words to produce a due effect will be less satisfied with. Yet what book is really greater? In the best parts the words have a magic in them; even in the inferior passages you are hardly sensible of their inferiority till you translate them into your own language. Perhaps no style ever written by man expressed so adequately the conceptions of a mind so strong and so peculiar; a manly strength, a haunting atmosphere of enhancing suggestions, a firm continuous music, are only some of its excellences. To comprehend the whole of the others, you must take the volume down and read it,—the best defence of Milton, as has been said most truly, against all objections.

Probably no book shows the transition which our theology has made since the middle of the seventeenth century, at once so plainly and so fully. We do not now compose long narratives to "justify the ways of God to man". The more orthodox we are, the more we shrink from it; the more we hesitate at such a task, the more we allege that we have no powers for it. Our most celebrated defences of established tenets are in the style of Butler, not in that of Milton. They do not profess to show a satisfactory explanation of human destiny; on the contrary, they hint that probably we could not understand such an explanation if it were given us; at any rate, they allow that it is not given us. Their course is palliative. They suggest an "analogy of difficulties". If our minds were greater, so they reason, we should comprehend these doctrines: now we cannot explain analogous facts which we see and know. No style can be more opposite to the bold argument, the boastful exposition of Milton. The teaching of the eighteenth century is in the very atmosphere we breathe. We read it in the teachings of Oxford;

we hear it from the missionaries of the Vatican. The air of the theology is clarified. We know our difficulties, at least; we are rather prone to exaggerate the weight of some than to deny the reality of any.

We cannot continue a line of thought which would draw us on too far for the patience of our readers. We must, however, make one more remark, and we shall have finished our criticism on "Paradise Lost". It is analogous to that which we have just made. The scheme of the poem is based on an offence against positive morality. The offence of Adam was not against nature or conscience, nor against anything of which we can see the reason, or conceive the obligation, but against an unexplained injunction of the Supreme Will. The rebellion in heaven, as Milton describes it, was a rebellion, not against known ethics, or immutable spiritual laws, but against an arbitrary selection and an unexplained edict. We do not say that there is no such thing as positive morality: we do not think so; even if we did, we should not insert a proposition so startling at the conclusion of a literary criticism. But we are sure that wherever a positive moral edict is promulgated, it is no subject, except perhaps under a very peculiar treatment, for literary art. By the very nature of it, it cannot satisfy the heart and conscience. It is a difficulty; we need not attempt to explain it away. There are mysteries enough which will never be explained away. But it is contrary to every principle of criticism to state the difficulty as if it were not one; to bring forward the puzzle, yet leave it to itself; to publish so strange a problem, and give only an untrue solution of it: and yet such, in its bare statement, is all that Milton has done.

Of Milton's other writings we have left ourselves no room to speak; and though every one of them, or almost every one of them, would well repay a careful criticism, yet

few of them seem to throw much additional light on his character, or add much to our essential notion of his genius, though they may exemplify and enhance it. "Comus" is the poem which does so the most. Literature has become so much lighter than it used to be, that we can scarcely realise the position it occupied in the light literature of our forefathers. We have now in our own language many poems that are pleasanter in their subject, more graceful in their execution, more flowing in their outline, more easy to read. Dr. Johnson, though perhaps no very excellent authority on the more intangible graces of literature, was disposed to deny to Milton the capacity of creating the lighter literature: "Milton, madam, was a genius that could cut a colossus from a rock, but could not carve heads upon cherry-stones". And it would not be surprising if this generation, which has access to the almost indefinite quantity of lighter compositions which have been produced since Johnson's time, were to echo his sentence. In some degree, perhaps, the popular taste does so. "Comus" has no longer the peculiar exceptional popularity which it used to have. We can talk without general odium of its defects. Its characters are nothing, its sentiments are tedious, its story is not interesting. But it is only when we have realised the magnitude of its deficiencies that we comprehend the peculiarity of its greatness. Its power is in its style. A grave and firm music pervades it: it is soft, without a thought of weakness; harmonious and yet strong; impressive, as few such poems are, yet covered with a bloom of beauty and a complexity of charm that few poems have either. We have, perhaps, light literature in itself better, that we read oftener and more easily, that lingers more in our memories; but we have not any, we question if there ever will be any, which gives so true a conception of the capacity and the dignity of the mind by which it was produced. The breath of solemnity which hovers round the

music attaches us to the writer. Every line, here as elsewhere, in Milton excites the idea of indefinite power.

And so we must draw to a close. The subject is an infinite one, and if we pursued it, we should lose ourselves in miscellaneous commentary, and run on far beyond the patience of our readers. What we have said has at least a defined intention. We have wished to state the impression which the character of Milton and the greatest of Milton's works are likely to produce on readers of the present generation—a generation different from his own almost more than any other.

LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU.[1]

(1862.)

NOTHING is so transitory as second-class fame. The name of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is hardly now known to the great mass of ordinary English readers. A generation has arisen which has had time to forget her. Yet only a few years since, an allusion to the "Lady Mary" would have been easily understood by every well-informed person; young ladies were enjoined to form their style upon hers; and no one could have anticipated that her letters would seem in 1862 as different from what a lady of rank would then write or publish as if they had been written in the times of paganism. The very change, however, of popular taste and popular morality gives these letters now a kind of interest. The farther and the more rapidly we have drifted from where we once lay, the more do we wish to learn what kind of port it was. We venture, therefore, to recommend the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as an instructive and profitable study, not indeed to the youngest of young ladies, but to those maturer persons of either sex "who have taken all knowledge to be their province," and who have commenced their readings in "universality" by an assiduous perusal of Parisian fiction.

[1] *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.* Edited by her Great-grandson, Lord Wharncliffe. Third edition, with Additions and Corrections derived from the original Manuscripts, illustrative Notes, and a New Memoir. By W. Moy Thomas. In two volumes. London: Henry Bohn.

It is, we admit, true that these letters are not at the present day very agreeable reading. What our grandfathers and grandmothers thought of them it is not so easy to say. But it now seems clear that Lady Mary was that most miserable of human beings, an ambitious and wasted woman; that she brought a very cultivated intellect into a very cultivated society; that she gave to that society what it was most anxious to receive, and received from it all which it had to bestow;—and yet that this all was to her as nothing. The high intellectual world of England has never been so compact, so visible in a certain sense, so enjoyable, as it was in her time. She had a mind to understand it, beauty to adorn it, and wit to amuse it; but she chose to pass a great part of her life in exile, and returned at last to die at home among a new generation, whose name she hardly knew, and to whom she herself was but a spectacle and a wonder.

Lady Mary Pierrepont—for that was by birth her name—belonged to a family which had a traditional reputation for ability and cultivation. The *Memoirs of Lucy Hutchinson*—(almost the only legacy that remains to us from the first generation of refined Puritans, the only book, at any rate, which effectually brings home to us how different they were in taste and in temper from their more vulgar and feeble successors)—contains a curious panegyric on *wise William* Pierrepont, to whom the Parliamentary party resorted as an oracle of judgment, and whom Cromwell himself, if tradition may be trusted, at times condescended to consult and court. He did not, however, transmit much of his discretion to his grandson, Lady Mary's father. This nobleman, for he inherited from an elder branch of the family both the marquisate of Dorchester and the dukedom of Kingston, was a mere man "about town," as the homely phrase then went, who passed a long life of fashionable idleness interspersed with

political intrigue, and who signalised his old age by marrying a young beauty of fewer years than his youngest daughter, who, as he very likely knew, cared nothing for him and much for another person. He had the "grand air," however, and he expected his children, when he visited them, to kneel down immediately and ask his blessing, which, if his character was what is said, must have been *very* valuable. The only attention he ever (that we know of) bestowed on Lady Mary was a sort of theatrical outrage, pleasant enough to her at the time, but scarcely in accordance with the educational theories in which we now believe. He was a member of the Kit-Cat, a great Whig club, the Brooks's of Queen Anne's time, which, like Brooks's, appears not to have been purely political, but to have found time for occasional relaxation and for somewhat unbusiness-like discussions. They held annually a formal meeting to arrange the female toasts for that year; and we are told that "a whim seized" her father "to nominate" Lady Mary, "then not eight years old, a candidate; alleging that she was far prettier than any lady on their list. The other members demurred, because the rules of the club forbade them to elect a beauty whom they had never seen. 'Then you shall see her,' cried he; and in the gaiety of the moment sent orders home to have her finely dressed and brought to him at the tavern, where she was received with acclamations, her claim unanimously allowed, her health drunk by every one present, and her name engraved in due form upon a drinking-glass. The company consisting of some of the most eminent men in England, she went from the lap of one poet, or patriot, or statesman, to the arms of another, was feasted with sweetmeats, overwhelmed with caresses, and what perhaps already pleased her better than either, heard her wit and beauty loudly extolled on every side. Pleasure, she said, was too poor a word to express

her sensations; they amounted to ecstasy: never again, throughout her whole future life, did she pass so happy a day. Nor, indeed, could she; for the love of admiration, which this scene was calculated to excite or increase, could never again be so fully gratified; there is always some alloying ingredient in the cup, some drawback upon the triumphs, of grown people. Her father carried on the frolic, and we may conclude, confirmed the taste, by having her picture painted for the club-room, that she might be enrolled a regular toast." Perhaps some young ladies of more than eight years old would not much object to have lived in those times. Fathers may be wiser now than they were then, but they rarely make themselves so thoroughly agreeable to their children.

This stimulating education would leave a weak and vain girl still more vain and weak; but it had not that effect on Lady Mary. Vain she probably was, and her father's boastfulness perhaps made her vainer; but her vanity took an intellectual turn. She read vaguely and widely; she managed to acquire some knowledge—how much is not clear—of Greek and Latin, and certainly learned with sufficient thoroughness French and Italian. She used to say that she had the worst education in the world, and that it was only by the "help of an uncommon memory and indefatigable labour" that she had acquired her remarkable attainments. Her father certainly seems to have been capable of any degree of inattention and neglect; but we should not perhaps credit too entirely all the legends which an old lady recounted to her grandchildren of the intellectual difficulties of her youth.

She seems to have been encouraged by her grandmother, one of the celebrated Evelyn family, whose memory is thus enigmatically but still expressively enshrined in the diary of the author of *Sylva*:—"Under this date," we are informed,

"of the 2nd of July, 1649, he records a day spent at Godstone, where Sir John" (this lady's father) "was on a visit with his daughter"; and he adds: "Mem. The prodigious memory of Sir John of Wilts's daughter, since married to Mr. W. Pierrepont." The lady who was thus formidable in her youth deigned in her old age to write frequently, as we should now say,—to open a "regular commerce" of letters, as was said in that age—with Lady Mary when quite a girl, which she always believed to have been beneficial to her, and probably believed rightly; for she was intelligent enough to comprehend what was said to her, and the old lady had watched many changes in many things.

Her greatest intellectual guide, at least so in after life she used to relate, was Mr. Wortley, whom she afterwards married. "When I was young," she said, "I was a great admirer of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and that was one of the chief reasons that set me upon the thoughts of stealing the Latin language. Mr. Wortley was the only person to whom I communicated my design, and he encouraged me in it. I used to study five or six hours a day for two years in my father's library; and so got that language, whilst everybody else thought I was reading nothing but novels and romances." She perused, however, some fiction also; for she possessed, till her death, the whole library of Mrs. Lennox's *Female Quixote*, a ponderous series of novels in folio, in one of which she had written, in her fairest youthful hand, the names and characteristic qualities of "the beautiful Diana, the volatile Clemene, the melancholy Doris, Celadon the faithful, Adamas the wise, and so on, forming two columns".

Of Mr. Wortley's character it is not difficult, from the materials before us, to decipher the features; he was a slow man, with a taste for quick companions. Swift's diary to Stella mentions an evening spent over a bottle of old wine

with Mr. Wortley and Mr. Addison. Mr. Wortley was a rigid Whig, and Swift's transition to Toryism soon broke short that friendship. But with Addison he maintained an intimacy which lasted during their joint lives, and survived the marriages of both. With Steele likewise he was upon the closest terms, is said to have written some papers in the *Tatler* and *Spectator;* and the second volume of the former is certainly dedicated to him in affectionate and respectful terms.

Notwithstanding, however, these conspicuous testimonials to high ability, Mr. Wortley was an orderly and dull person. Every letter received by him from his wife during five and twenty years of absence, was found, at his death, carefully endorsed with the date of its arrival, and with a *synopsis* of its contents. "He represented," we are told, "at various times, Huntingdon, Westminster, and Peterborough in Parliament, and appears to have been a member of that class who win respectful attention by sober and business-like qualities; and his name is constantly found in the drier and more formal part of the politics of the time." He answered to the description given more recently of a similar person: "Is not," it was asked, "Sir John ——— a very methodical person?" "Certainly he is," was the reply, "he files his invitations to dinner." The Wortley papers, according to the description of those who have inspected them, seem to contain the accumulations of similar documents during many years. He hoarded money, however, to more purpose, for he died one of the richest commoners in England; and a considerable part of the now marvellous wealth of the Bute family seems at first to have been derived from him.

Whatever good qualities Addison and Steele discovered in Mr. Wortley, they were certainly not those of a good writer. We have from his pen and from that of Lady Mary

a description of the state of English politics during the three first years of George III., and any one who wishes to understand how much readability depends upon good writing would do well to compare the two. Lady Mary's is a clear and bright description of all the superficial circumstances of the time; Mr. Wortley's is equally superficial, often unintelligible and always lumbering, and scarcely succeeds in telling us more than that the writer was wholly unsuccessful in all which he tried to do. As to Mr. Wortley's contributions to the periodicals of his time, we may suspect that the jottings preserved at London are all which he ever wrote of them, and that the style and arrangement were supplied by more skilful writers. Even a county member might furnish headings for the *Saturday Review*. He might say: "*Trent* British vessel—Americans always intrusive—Support Government—Kill all that is necessary".

What Lady Mary discovered in Mr. Wortley it is easier to say and shorter, for he was very handsome. If his portrait can be trusted, there was a placid and business like repose about him, which might easily be attractive to a rather excitable and wild young lady, especially when combined with imposing features and a quiet sweet expression. He attended *to her* also. When she was a girl of fourteen, he met her at a party, and evinced his admiration. And a little while later, it is not difficult to fancy that a literary young lady might be much pleased with a good-looking gentleman not uncomfortably older than herself, yet having a place in the world, and well known to the literary men of the age. He was acquainted with the classics too, or was supposed to be so; and whether it was a consequence of or a preliminary to their affections, Lady Mary wished to know the classics also.

Bishop Burnet was so kind as to superintend the singular studies—for such they were clearly thought—of this

aristocratic young lady; and the translation of the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus, which he revised, is printed in this edition of her works. But even so grave an undertaking could not wholly withdraw her from more congenial pursuits. She commenced a correspondence with Miss Wortley, Mr. Wortley's unmarried sister, which still remains, though Miss Wortley's letters are hardly to be called hers, for her brother composed, and she merely copied them. The correspondence is scarcely in the sort of English or in the tone which young ladies, we understand, now use.

"It is as impossible," says Miss Wortley, "for my dearest Lady Mary to utter thought that can seem dull as to put on a look that is not beautiful. Want of wit is a fault that those who envy you most would not be able to find in your kind compliments. To me they seem perfect, since repeated assurances of your kindness forbid me to question their sincerity. You have often found that the most angry, nay, the most neglectful air you can assume, has made as deep a wound as the kindest; and these lines of yours, that you tax with dulness (perhaps because they were writ when you was not in a right humour, or when your thoughts were elsewhere employed), are so far from deserving the imputation, that the very turn of your expression, had I forgot the rest of your charms, would be sufficient to make me lament the only fault you have—your inconstancy."

To which the reply is:—

"I am infinitely obliged to you, my dear Mrs. Wortley, for the wit, beauty, and other fine qualities you so generously bestow upon me. Next to receiving them from heaven, you are the person from whom I would choose to receive gifts and graces: I am very well satisfied to owe them to your own delicacy of imagination, which represents to you the idea of a fine lady, and you have good nature enough to fancy I am she. All this is mighty well, but you do not stop there; imagination is boundless. After giving me imaginary wit and beauty, you give me imaginary passions, and you tell me I'm in love: if I am it is a perfect sin of ignorance, for I don't so much as know the man's name: I have been studying these three hours, and cannot guess who you mean. I passed the days of Nottingham races [at] Thoresby without seeing, or even wishing to see, one of the sex. Now, if I am in love, I have very hard fortune

to conceal it so industriously from my own knowledge, and yet discover it so much to other people. 'Tis against all form to have such a passion as that, without giving one sigh for the matter. Pray tell me the name of him I love, that I may (according to the laudable custom of lovers) sigh to the woods and groves hereabouts, and teach it to the echo."

After some time Miss Wortley unfortunately died, and there was an obvious difficulty in continuing the correspondence without the aid of an appropriate sisterly screen. Mr. Wortley seems to have been tranquil and condescending; perhaps he thought placid tactics would be most effective, for Lady Mary was not so calm. He sent her some *Tatlers*, and received, by way of thanks, the following tolerably encouraging letter:—

"*To Mr. Wortley Montagu.*

"I am surprised at one of the *Tatlers* you send me; is it possible to have any sort of esteem for a person one believes capable of having such trifling inclinations? Mr. Bickerstaff has very wrong notions of our sex. I can say there are some of us that despise charms of show, and all the pageantry of greatness, perhaps with more ease than any of the philosophers. In contemning the world, they seem to take pains to contemn it; we despise it, without taking the pains to read lessons of morality to make us do it. At least I know I have always looked upon it with contempt, without being at the expense of one serious reflection to oblige me to it. I carry the matter yet farther; was I to choose of two thousand pounds a year or twenty thousand, the first would be my choice. There is something of an unavoidable *embarras* in making what is called a great figure in the world; [it] takes off from the happiness of life; I hate the noise and hurry inseparable from great estates and titles, and look upon both as blessings that ought only to be given to fools, for 'tis only to them that they are blessings. The pretty fellows you speak of, I own, entertain me sometimes; but is it impossible to be diverted with what one despises? I can laugh at a puppet-show; at the same time I know there is nothing in it worth my attention or regard. General notions are generally wrong. Ignorance and folly are thought the best foundations for virtue, as if not knowing what a good wife is was necessary to make one so. I confess that can never be my way of reasoning; as I always forgive an *injury* when I think it not done out of malice, I can

never think myself *obliged* by what is done without design. Give me leave to say it (I know it sounds vain), I know how to make a man of sense happy; but then that man must resolve to contribute something towards it himself. I have so much esteem for you, I should be very sorry to hear you was unhappy; but for the world I would not be the instrument of making you so; which (of the humour you are) is hardly to be avoided if I am your wife. You distrust me—I can neither be easy, nor loved, where I am distrusted. Nor do I believe your passion for me is what you pretend it; at least I am sure was I in love I could not talk as you do. Few women would have spoke so plainly as I have done; but to dissemble is among the things I never do. I take more pains to approve my conduct to myself than to the world; and would not have to accuse myself of a minute's deceit. I wish I loved you enough to devote myself to be for ever miserable, for the pleasure of a day or two's happiness. I cannot resolve upon it. You must think otherwise of me, or not at all.

"I don't enjoin you to burn this letter. I know you will. 'Tis the first I ever writ to one of your sex, and shall be the last. You must never expect another. I resolve against all correspondence of the kind; my resolutions are seldom made, and never broken."

Mr. Wortley, however, still grumbled. He seems to have expected a young lady to do something even more decisive than ask him to marry her. He continued to hesitate and pause. The lady in the comedy says, "What right has a man to intend unless he states his intentions?" and Lady Mary's biographers are entirely of that opinion. They think her exceedingly ill-used, and Mr. Wortley exceedingly to blame. And so it may have been; certainly a love-correspondence is rarely found where activity and intrepidity on the lady's side so much contrasts with quiescence and timidity on the gentleman's. If, however, we could summon him before us, probably Mr. Wortley would have something to answer on his own behalf. It is tolerably plain that he thought Lady Mary too excitable. "Certainly," he doubtless reasoned, "she is a handsome young lady, and very witty; but beauty and wit are dangerous as well as attractive. Vivacity is delightful; but my

esteemed friend Mr. Addison has observed that excessive quickness of parts is not unfrequently the cause of extreme rapidity in action. Lady Mary makes love to me before marriage, and I like it; but may she not make love also to some one else after marriage? and then I shall not like it." Accordingly he writes to her timorously as to her love of pleasure, her love of romantic reading, her occasional toleration of younger gentlemen and quicker admirers. At last, however, he proposed; and, as far as the lady was concerned, there was no objection.

We might have expected, from a superficial view of the facts, that there would have been no difficulty either on the side of her father. Mr. Wortley died one of the richest commoners in England; was of the first standing in society, of good family, and he had apparently, therefore, money to settle and station to offer to his bride. And he did offer both. He was ready to settle an ample sum on Lady Mary, both as his wife and as his widow, and was anxious that, if they married, they should live in a manner suitable to her rank and his prospects. But nevertheless there was a difficulty. The *Tatler* had recently favoured its readers with dissertations upon social ethics not altogether dissimilar to those with which the *Saturday Review* frequently instructs its readers. One of those dissertations[1] contained an elaborate exposure of the folly of settling your estate upon your unborn children. The arguments were of a sort very easily imaginable. "Why," it was said, "should you give away that which you have to a person whom you do not know; whom you may never see; whom you may not like when you do see; who may be undutiful, unpleasant, or idiotic? Why, too, should each generation surrender its due control over the next? When the family estate is settled, men of the world know that the father's control is gone, for dis-

[1] No. 223, 12th September, 1710.

interested filial affection is an unfrequent though doubtless possible virtue; but so long as *property* is in suspense, all expectants will be attentive to those who have it in their power to give or not to give it." These arguments had converted Mr. Wortley, who is said even to have contributed notes for the article, and they seem to have converted Lady Mary also. She was to have her money, and the most plain-spoken young ladies do not commonly care to argue much about the future provision for their possible children; the subject is always delicate and a little frightful, and on the whole, must be left to themselves. But Lord Dorchester, her father, felt it his duty to be firm. It is an old saying, that "you never know where a man's conscience may turn up," and the advent of ethical feeling was in this case even unusually beyond calculation. Lord Dorchester had never been an anxious father, and was not now going to be a liberal father. He had never cared much about Lady Mary, except in so far as he could himself gain *éclat* by exhibiting her youthful beauty, and he was not now at her marriage about to do at all more than was necessary and decent in his station. It was not therefore apparently probable that he would be irritatingly obstinate respecting the income of his daughter's children. He was so, however. He deemed it a duty to see that "*his* grandchild never should be a beggar," and, for what reason does not so clearly appear, wished that his eldest male grandchild should be immensely richer than all his other grandchildren. The old feudal aristocrat, often in modern Europe so curiously disguised in the indifferent exterior of a careless man of the world, was, as became him, dictatorial and unalterable upon the duty of founding a family. Though he did not care much for his daughter, he cared much for the position of his daughter's eldest son. He had probably stumbled on the fundamental truth that "girls were girls, and boys were boys," and was disinclined

to disregard the rule of primogeniture by which he had obtained his marquisate, and from which he expected a dukedom.

Mr. Wortley, however, was through life a man, if eminent in nothing else, eminent at least in obstinacy. He would not give up the doctrine of the *Tatler* even to obtain Lady Mary. The match was accordingly abandoned, and Lord Dorchester looked out for and found another gentleman whom he proposed to make his son-in-law; for he believed, according to the old morality, "that it was the duty of the parents to find a husband for a daughter, and that when he was found, it was the daughter's duty to marry him". It was as wrong in her to attempt to choose as in him to neglect to seek. Lady Mary was, however, by no means disposed to accept this passive theory of female obligation. She *had* sought and chosen; and to her choice she intended to adhere. The conduct of Mr. Wortley would have offended some ladies, but it rather augmented her admiration. She had exactly that sort of irritable intellect which sets an undue value on new theories of society and morality, and is pleased when others do so too. She thought Mr. Wortley was quite right not to "defraud himself for a possible infant," and admired his constancy and firmness. She determined to risk a step, as she herself said, unjustifiable to her own relatives, but which she nevertheless believed that she could justify to herself. She decided on eloping with Mr. Wortley.

Before, however, taking this audacious leap, she looked a little. Though she did not object to the sacrifice of the customary inheritance of her contingent son, she by no means approved of sacrificing the settlement which Mr. Wortley had undertaken at a prior period of the negotiation to make upon herself. And, according to common sense, she was undoubtedly judicious. She was going from her

father, and foregoing the money which he had promised her; and therefore it was not reasonable that, by going *to* her lover, she should forfeit also the money which *he* had promised her. And there is nothing offensive in her mode of expression. "'Tis something odd for a woman that brings nothing to expect anything; but after the way of my education, I dare not pretend to live but in some degree suitable to it. I had rather die than return to a dependency upon relations I have disobliged. Save me from that fear, if you love me. If you cannot, or think I ought not to expect it, be sincere and tell me so. 'Tis better I should not be yours at all, than, for a short happiness, involve myself in ages of misery. I hope there will never be occasion for this precaution; but, however, 'tis necessary to make it." But true and rational as all this seems, perhaps it is still truer and still more rational to say, that if a woman has not sufficient confidence in her lover to elope with him without a previous promise of a good settlement, she had better not elope with him at all. After all, if he declines to make the stipulated settlement, the lady will have either to return to her friends or to marry without it, and she would have the full choice between these satisfactory alternatives, even if she asked no previous promise from her lover. At any rate, the intrusion of coarse money among the refined materials of romance is, in this case, even more curious and remarkable than usual.

After some unsuccessful attempts, Lady Mary and Mr. Wortley did elope and did marry, and, after a certain interval, of course, Lord Dorchester received them, notwithstanding their contempt of his authority, into some sort of favour and countenance. They had probably saved him money by their irregularity, and economical frailties are rarely judged severely by men of fashion who are benefited by them. Lady Mary, however, was long a little mis-

trusted by her own relations, and never seems to have acquired much family influence; but her marriage was not her only peculiarity, or the only one which impartial relations might dislike.

The pair appear to have been for a little while tolerably happy. Lady Mary was excitable, and wanted letters when absent, and attention when present: Mr. Wortley was heavy and slow; could not write letters when away, and seemed torpid in her society when at home. Still, these are common troubles. Common, too, is the matrimonial correspondence upon baby's deficiency in health, and on Mrs. Behn's opinion that "the cold bath is the best medicine for weak children". It seems an odd end to a deferential perusal of Latin authors in girlhood, and to a spirited elopement with the preceptor in after years; but the transition is only part of the usual irony of human life.

The world, both social and political, into which Lady Mary was introduced by her marriage was singularly calculated to awaken the faculties, to stimulate the intellect, to sharpen the wit, and to harden the heart of an intelligent, witty, and hard-headed woman. The world of London—even the higher world—is now too large to be easily seen, or to be pithily described. The elements are so many, their position is so confused, the display of their mutual counteraction is so involved, that many years must pass away before even a very clever woman can thoroughly comprehend it all. She will cease to be young and handsome long ere she does comprehend it. And when she at last understands it, it does not seem a fit subject for concise and summary wit. Its evident complexity refuses to be condensed into pithy sayings and brilliant *bons-mots*. It has fallen into the hands of philosophers, with less brains perhaps than the satirists of our fathers, but with more anxiety to tell the whole truth, more toleration for the

many-sidedness of the world, with less of sharp conciseness, but, perhaps, with more of useful completeness. As are the books, so are the readers. People do not wish to read satire now-a-days. The epigrams even of Pope would fall dull and dead upon this serious and investigating time. The folly of the last age affected levity; the folly of this, as we all know, encases itself in ponderous volumes which defy refutation, in elaborate arguments which prove nothing, in theories which confuse the uninstructed, and which irritate the well-informed. The folly of a hundred years since was at least the folly of Vivien, but ours is the folly of Merlin:—

> "*You* read the book, my pretty Vivien,
> And none can read the text, not even I,
> And none can read the comments but myself—
> Oh, the results are simple!"[1]

Perhaps people did not know then as much as they know now: indisputably they knew nothing like so much in a superficial way *about* so many things; but they knew far more correctly where their knowledge began and where it stopped; what they thought and why they thought it: they had readier illustrations and more summary phrases; they could say at once what it *came to*, and to what action it should lead.

The London of the eighteenth century was an aristocratic world, which lived to itself, which displayed the virtues and developed the vices of an aristocracy which was under little fear of external control or check; which had emancipated itself from the control of the crown; which had not fallen under the control of the *bourgeoisie;* which saw its own life, and saw that, according to its own maxims, it was good. Public opinion now rules, and it is an opinion which constrains the conduct, and narrows the experience,

[1] Tennyson: "Merlin and Vivien".

and dwarfs the violence, and minimises the frankness of the highest classes, while it diminishes their vices, supports their conscience, and precludes their grossness. There was nothing like this in the last century, especially in the early part of it. The aristocracy came to town from their remote estates—where they were uncontrolled by any opinion or by any equal society, and where the eccentricities and personalities of each character were fostered and exaggerated —to a London which was like a large county town, in which everybody of rank knew everybody of rank, where the eccentricities of each rural potentate came into picturesque collision with the eccentricities of other rural potentates, where the most minute allusions to the peculiarities and the career of the principal persons were instantly understood, where squibs were on every table, and where satire was in the air. No finer field of social observation could be found for an intelligent and witty woman. Lady Mary understood it at once.

Nor was the political life of the last century so unfavourable to the influence and so opposed to the characteristic comprehension of women as our present life. We are now ruled by political discussion and by a popular assembly, by leading articles, and by the House of Commons. But women can scarcely ever compose leaders, and no woman sits in our representative chamber. The whole tide of abstract discussion, which fills our mouths and deafens our ears, the whole complex accumulation of facts and figures to which we refer everything, and which we apply to everything, is quite unfemale. A lady has an insight into what she sees; but how will this help her with the case of the *Trent*, with the proper structure of a representative chamber, with Indian finance or parliamentary reform? Women are clever, but cleverness of itself is nothing at present. A sharp Irish writer described himself "as bothered entirely

by the want of preliminary information"; women are in the same difficulty now. Their nature may hereafter change, as some sanguine advocates suggest. But the visible species certainly have not the intellectual providence to acquire the vast stores of dry information which alone can enable them to judge adequately of our present controversies. We are ruled by a machinery of oratory and discussion, in which women have no share, and which they hardly comprehend: we are engaged on subjects which need an arduous learning, to which they have no pretensions.

In the last century much of this was very different. The court still counted for much in English politics. The House of Commons was the strongest power in the State machine, but it was not so immeasurably the strongest power as now. It was absolutely supreme within its sphere, but that sphere was limited. It could absolutely control the money, and thereby the policy, of the State. Whether there should be peace or war, excise or no excise, it could and did despotically determine. It was supreme in its choice of *measures*. But, on the other hand, it had only a secondary influence in the choice of *persons*. Who the Prime Minister was to be, was a question not only theoretically determinable, but in fact determined by the Sovereign. The House of Commons could despotically impose two conditions: first, that the Prime Minister should be a man of sufficient natural ability, and sufficient parliamentary experience, to conduct the business of his day; secondly, that he should adopt the policy which the nation wished. But, subject to a conformity with these prerequisites, the selection of the king was nearly uncontrolled. Sir Robert Walpole was the greatest master of parliamentary tactics and political business in his generation; he was a statesman of wide views and consummate dexterity; but these intellectual gifts, even joined to immense parliamentary experience, were not alone sufficient to

make him and to keep him Prime Minister of England. He also maintained, during two reigns, a complete system of court-strategy. During the reign of George II. he kept a *queen-watcher*. Lord Hervey, one of the cleverest men in England, the keenest observer, perhaps, in England, was induced, by very dexterous management, to remain at court during many years—to observe the queen, to hint to the queen, to remove wrong impressions from the queen, to confirm the Walpolese predilections of the queen, to report every incident to Sir Robert. The records of politics tell us few stranger tales than that it should have been necessary for the Sir Robert Peel of the age to hire a subordinate as safe as Eldon, and as witty as Canning, for the sole purpose of managing a clever German woman, to whom the selection of a Prime Minister was practically intrusted. Nor was this the only court-campaign which Sir Robert had to conduct, or in which he was successful. Lady Mary, who hated him much, has satirically described the foundation upon which his court favour rested during the reign of George I. :—

"The new court with all their train was arrived before I left the country. The Duke of Marlborough was returned in a sort of triumph, with the apparent merit of having suffered for his fidelity to the succession, and was reinstated in his office of general, etc. In short, all people who had suffered any hardship or disgrace during the late ministry would have it believed that it was occasioned by their attachment to the House of Hanover. Even Mr. Walpole, who had been sent to the Tower for a piece of bribery proved upon him, was called a confessor to the cause. But he had another piece of good luck that yet more contributed to his advancement; he had a very handsome sister, whose folly had lost her reputation in London; but the yet greater folly of Lord Townshend, who happened to be a neighbour in Norfolk to Mr. Walpole, had occasioned his being drawn in to marry her some months before the queen died.

"Lord Townshend had that sort of understanding which commonly makes men honest in the first part of their lives; they follow the instructions of their tutor, and, till somebody thinks it worth their while to show

them a new path, go regularly on in the road where they are set. Lord Townshend had then been many years an excellent husband to a sober wife, a kind master to all his servants and dependents, a serviceable relation wherever it was in his power, and followed the instinct of nature in being fond of his children. Such a sort of behaviour without any glaring absurdity, either in prodigality or avarice, always gains a man the reputation of reasonable and honest; and this was his character when the Earl of Godolphin sent him envoy to the States, not doubting but he would be faithful to his orders, without giving himself the trouble of criticising on them, which is what all ministers wish in an envoy. Robotun, a French refugee (secretary to Bernstoff, one of the Elector of Hanover's ministers), happened then to be at the Hague, and was civilly received at Lord Townshend's, who treated him at his table with the English hospitality, and he was charmed with a reception which his birth and education did not entitle him to. Lord Townshend was recalled when the queen changed her ministry; his wife died, and he retired into the country, where (as I have said before), Walpole had art enough to make him marry his sister Dolly. At that time, I believe, he did not propose much more advantage by the match than to get rid of a girl that lay heavy on his hands.

"When King George ascended the throne, he was surrounded by all his German ministers and playfellows, male and female. Baron Goritz was the most considerable among them both for birth and fortune. He had managed the king's treasury thirty years with the utmost fidelity and economy; and had the true German honesty, being a plain, sincere, and unambitious man. Bernstoff, the secretary, was of a different turn. He was avaricious, artful, and designing; and had got his share in the king's councils by bribing his women. Robotun was employed in these matters, and had the sanguine ambition of a Frenchman. He resolved there should be an English ministry of his choosing; and, knowing none of them personally but Townshend, he had not failed to recommend him to his master, and his master to the king, as the only proper person for the important post of Secretary of State; and he entered upon that office with universal applause, having at that time a very popular character, which he might possibly have retained for ever if he had not been entirely governed by his wife and her brother R. Walpole, whom he immediately advanced to be paymaster, esteemed a post of exceeding profit, and very necessary for his indebted estate."

And it is indisputable that Lord Townshend, who thought he was a very great statesman, and who began as

the patron of Sir Robert Walpole, nevertheless was only his court-agent—the manager on his behalf of the king and of the king's mistresses.

We need not point out at length, for the passage we have cited of itself indicates, how well suited this sort of politics is to the comprehension and to the pen of a keen-sighted and witty woman.

Nor was the court the principal improver of the London society of the age. The House of Commons was then a part of society. This separate, isolated, aristocratic world, of which we have spoken, had an almost undisputed command of both Houses in the Legislature. The letter of the constitution did not give it them, and no law appointed that it should be so. But the aristocratic class were by far the most educated, by far the most respected, by far the most *eligible* part of the nation. Even in the boroughs, where there was universal suffrage, or something near it, they were the favourites. Accordingly, they gave the tone to the House of Commons; they required the small community of members who did not belong to their order to conform as far as they could to their usages, and to guide themselves by their code of morality and of taste. In the main the House of Commons obeyed these injunctions, and it was repaid by being incorporated within the aristocratic world: it became not only the council of the nation, but the debating-club of fashion. That which was "received" modified the recipient. The remains of the aristocratic society, wherever we find them, are penetrated not only with an aristocratic but with a political spirit. They breathe a sort of atmosphere of politics. In the London of the present day, the vast miscellaneous *bourgeois* London, we all know that this is not so. "In the country," said a splenetic observer, "people talk politics; at London dinners you talk nothing; between two pillars of crinoline you eat

and are resigned." A hundred and fifty years ago, as far as our rather ample materials inform us, people in London talked politics just as they now talk politics in Worcestershire; and being on the spot, and cooped up with politicians in a small social world, their talk was commonly better. They knew the people of whom they spoke, even if they did not know the subjects with which they were concerned.

No element is better fitted to counteract the characteristic evil of an aristocratic society. The defect of such societies in all times has been frivolity. All talk has tended to become gossip; it has ceased to deal with important subjects, and has devoted itself entirely to unimportant incidents. Whether the Duc de —— has more or less prevailed with the Marquise de —— is a sort of common form into which any details may be fitted, and any names inserted. The frivolities of gallantry—never very important save to some woman who has long been dead--fill the records of all aristocracies who lived under a despotism, who had no political authority, no daily political cares. The aristocracy of England in the last century was, at any rate, exempt from *this* reproach. There is in the records of it not only an intellectuality, which would prove little—for every clever describer, by the subtleties of his language and the arrangement of his composition, gives a sort of intellectuality even to matters which have no pretension to it themselves—but likewise a pervading medium of political discussion. The very language in which they are written is the language of political business. Horace Walpole was certainly by nature no politician and no orator; yet no discerning critic can read a page of his voluminous remains without feeling that the writer has through life lived with politicians and talked with politicians. A keen observant mind, not naturally political, but capable of comprehending and viewing any subject which

was brought before it, has chanced to have this particular subject—politics—presented to it for a lifetime; and all its delineations, all its efforts, all its thoughts, reflect it, and are coloured by it. In all the records of the eighteenth century the tonic of business is seen to combat the relaxing effect of habitual luxury.

This element, too, is favourable to a clever woman. The more you can put before such a person the greater she will be; the less her world, the less she is. If you place the most keen-sighted lady in the midst of the pure futilities and unmitigated flirtations of an aristocracy, she will sink to the level of those elements, and will scarcely seem to wish for anything more, or to be competent for anything higher. But if she is placed in an intellectual atmosphere, in which political or other important subjects are currently passing, you will probably find that she can talk better upon them than you can, without your being able to explain whence she derived either her information or her talent.

The subjects, too, which were discussed in the political society of the last age were not so inscrutable to women as our present subjects; and even when there were great difficulties they were more on a level with men in the discussion of them than they now are. It was no disgrace to be destitute of preliminary information at a time in which there were no accumulated stores from which such information could be derived. A lightening element of female influence is therefore to be found through much of the politics of the eighteenth century.

Lady Mary entered easily into all this world, both social and political. She had beauty for the fashionable, satire for the witty, knowledge for the learned, and intelligence for the politician. She was not too refined to shrink from what we now consider the coarseness of that time. Many of her verses themselves are scarcely adapted for our decorous

pages. Perhaps the following give no unfair idea of her ordinary state of mind:—

"TOWN ECLOGUES.

"ROXANA; OR, THE DRAWING-ROOM.

'Roxana, from the court retiring late,
Sigh'd her soft sorrows at St. James's Gate.
Such heavy thoughts lay brooding in her breast,
Not her own chairmen with more weight oppress'd;
They groan the cruel load they're doom'd to bear;
She in these gentle sounds express'd her care.
"'Was it for this that I these roses wear?
For this new-set the jewels for my hair?
Ah! Princess! with what zeal have I pursued!
Almost forgot the duty of a prude.
Thinking I never could attend too soon,
I've miss'd my prayers, to get me dress'd by noon.
For thee, ah! what for thee did I resign!
My pleasures, passions, all that e'er was mine.
I sacrific'd both modesty and ease,
Left operas and went to filthy plays;
Double-entendres shock my tender ear;
Yet even this for thee I choose to bear.
In glowing youth, when nature bids be gay,
And every joy of life before me lay,
By honour prompted, and by pride restrain'd,
The pleasures of the young my soul disdain'd:
Sermons I sought, and with a mien severe
Censur'd my neighbours, and said daily prayer.
"'Alas! how chang'd—with the same sermon-mien
That once I pray'd, the "What d'ye call't"[1] I've seen.
Ah! cruel Princess, for thy sake I've lost
That reputation which so dear had cost:
I, who avoided every public place,
When bloom and beauty bade me show my face,
Now near thee constant every night abide
With never-failing duty by thy side;

[1] A mock-tragedy by Gay.

Myself and daughters standing on a row,
To all the foreigners a goodly show!
Oft had your drawing-room been sadly thin,
And merchants' wives close by the chair been seen,
Had not I amply filled the empty space,
And saved your highness from the dire disgrace.
"'Yet Coquetilla's artifice prevails,
When all my merit and my duty fails;
That Coquetilla, whose deluding airs
Corrupt our virgins, still our youth ensnares;
So sunk her character, so lost her fame,
Scarce visited before your highness came:
Yet for the bed-chamber 'tis her you choose,
When zeal and fame and virtue you refuse.
Ah! worthy choice! not one of all your train
Whom censure blasts not, and dishonours stain!
Let the nice hind now suckle dirty pigs,
And the proud pea-hen hatch the cuckoo's eggs!
Let Iris leave her paint and own her age,
And grave Suffolk a wed a giddy page!
A greater miracle is daily view'd,
A virtuous Princess with a court so lewd.
"'I know thee, Court! with all thy treach'rous wiles,
Thy false caresses and undoing smiles!
Ah! Princess, learn'd in all the courtly arts,
To cheat our hopes, and yet to gain our hearts!
"'Large lovely bribes are the great statesman's aim;
And the neglected patriot follows fame.
The Prince is ogled; some the King pursue;
But your Roxana only follows you.
Despis'd Roxana, cease, and try to find
Some other, since the Princess proves unkind:
Perhaps it is not hard to find at court,
If not a greater, a more firm support.'"

There was every kind of rumour as to Lady Mary's own conduct, and we have no means of saying whether any of these rumours were true. There is no evidence against her which is worthy of the name. So far as can be proved, she was simply a gay, witty, bold-spoken, handsome woman,

who made many enemies by unscrupulous speech, and many friends by unscrupulous flirtation. We may believe, but we cannot prove, that she found her husband tedious, and was dissatisfied that his slow, methodical, *borné* mind made so little progress in the political world, and understood so little of what really passed there. Unquestionably she must have much preferred talking to Lord Hervey to talking with Mr. Montagu. But we must not credit the idle scandals of a hundred years since, because they may have been true, or because they appear not inconsistent with the characters of those to whom they relate. There were legends against every attractive and fashionable woman in that age, and most of the legends were doubtless exaggerations and inventions. We cannot know the truth of such matters now, and it would hardly be worth searching into if we could; but the important fact is certain, Lady Mary lived in a world in which the worst rumours were greedily told, and often believed, about her and others; and the moral refinement of a woman must always be impaired by such a contact.

Lady Mary was so unfortunate as to incur the partial dislike of one of the great recorders of that age, and the bitter hostility of the other. She was no favourite with Horace Walpole, and the bitter enemy of Pope. The first is easily explicable. Horace Walpole never loved his father, but recompensed himself by hating his father's enemies. No one connected with the opposition to Sir Robert is spared by his son, if there be a fair opportunity for unfavourable insinuation. Mr. Wortley Montagu was the very man for a grave mistake. He made the very worst that could be made in that age. He joined the party of constitutional exiles on the Opposition bench, who had no real objection to the policy of Sir Robert Walpole; who, when they had a chance, adopted that policy themselves; who

were discontented because they had no power, and he had all the power. Probably too, being a man eminently respectable, Mr. Montagu was frightened at Sir Robert's unscrupulous talk and not very scrupulous actions. At any rate, he opposed Sir Robert; and thence many a little observation of Horace Walpole's against Lady Mary.

Why Pope and Lady Mary quarrelled is a question on which much discussion has been expended, and on which a judicious German professor might even now compose an interesting and exhaustive monograph. A curt English critic will be more apt to ask, "Why they should *not* have quarrelled?" We know that Pope quarrelled with almost every one; we know that Lady Mary quarrelled or half quarrelled with most of her acquaintances. Why, then, should they not have quarrelled with one another?

It is certain that they were very intimate at one time; for Pope wrote to her some of the most pompous letters of compliment in the language. And the more intimate they were to begin with, the more sure they were to be enemies in the end. Human nature will not endure that sort of proximity. An irritable, vain poet, who always fancies that people are trying to hurt him, whom no argument could convince that every one is not perpetually thinking about him, cannot long be friendly with a witty woman of unscrupulous tongue, who spares no one, who could sacrifice a good friend for a bad *bon-mot*, who thinks of the person whom she is addressing, not of those about whom she is speaking. The natural relation of the two is that of victim and torturer, and no other will long continue. There appear also to have been some money matters (of all things in the world) between the two. Lady Mary was intrusted by Pope with some money to use in speculation during the highly fashionable panic which derives its name from the South-Sea Bubble,—and as of course it was lost, Pope was very

angry. Another story goes, that Pope made serious love to Lady Mary, and that she laughed at him; upon which a very personal, and not always very correct, controversy has arisen as to the probability or improbability of Pope's exciting a lady's feelings. Lord Byron took part in it with his usual acuteness and incisiveness, and did not leave the discussion more decent than he found it. Pope doubtless was deformed, and had not the large red health that uncivilised women admire; yet a clever lady might have taken a fancy to him, for the little creature knew what he was saying. There is, however, no evidence that Lady Mary did so. We only know that there was a sudden coolness or quarrel between them, and that it was the beginning of a long and bitter hatred.

In their own times Pope's sensitive disposition probably gave Lady Mary a great advantage. Her tongue perhaps gave him more pain than his pen gave her. But in later times she has fared the worst. What between Pope's sarcasms and Horace Walpole's anecdotes, Lady Mary's reputation has suffered very considerably. As we have said, her offences are *non proven;* there is no evidence to convict her; but she is likely to be condemned upon the general doctrine that a person who is accused of much is probably guilty of something.

During many years Lady Mary continued to live a distinguished fashionable and social life, with a single remarkable break. This interval was her journey to Constantinople. The powers that then were, thought fit to send Mr. Wortley as ambassador to Constantinople, and his wife accompanied him. During that visit she kept a journal, and wrote sundry real letters, out of which, after her return, she composed a series of unreal letters as to all she saw and did in Turkey, and on the journey there and back, which were published, and which are still amusing, if not always select, reading.

The Sultan was not then the "dying man"; he was the "Grand Turk". He was not simply a potentate to be counted with, but a power to be feared. The appearance of a Turkish army on the Danube had in that age much the same effect as the appearance of a Russian army now. It was an object of terror and dread. A mission at Constantinople was not then a *bureau* for interference in Turkey, but a serious office for transacting business with a great European power. A European ambassador at Constantinople now presses on the Government there impracticable reforms; he then asked for useful aid. Lady Mary was evidently impressed by the power of the country in which she sojourned; and we observe in her letters evident traces of the notion that the Turk was the dread of Christendom,—which is singular now, when the Turk is its *protégé*.

Lady Mary had another advantage too. Many sorts of books make steady progress; a scientific treatise published now is sure to be fuller and better than one on the same subject written long ago. But with books of travel in a stationary country the presumption is the contrary. In that case the old book is probably the better book. The first traveller writes out a plain, straightforward description of the most striking objects with which he meets; he believes that his readers know nothing of the country of which he is writing, for till he visited it he probably knew nothing himself; and, if he is sensible, he describes simply and clearly all which most impresses him. He has no motive for not dwelling upon the principal things, and most likely will do so, as they are probably the most conspicuous. The second traveller is not so fortunate. He is always in terror of the traveller who went before. He fears the criticism,—"This is all very well, *but* we knew the whole of it before. No. 1 said that at page 103." In consequence he is timid. He picks and skips. He fancies that you are

acquainted with all which is great and important, and he dwells, for your good and to your pain, upon that which is small and unimportant. For ordinary readers no result can be more fatal. They perhaps never read—they certainly do not remember—anything upon the subject. The curious *minutiæ*, so elaborately set forth, are quite useless, for they have not the general framework in which to store them. Not knowing much of the first traveller's work, that of the second is a supplement to a treatise with which they are unacquainted. In consequence they do not read it. Lady Mary made good use of her position in the front of the herd of tourists. She told us what she saw in Turkey—all the best of what she saw, and all the most remarkable things—and told it very well.

Nor was this work the only fruit of her Turkish travels; she brought home the notion of inoculation. Like most improvers, she was roughly spoken to. Medical men were angry because the practice was not in their books, and conservative men were cross at the agony of a new idea. Religious people considered it wicked to have a disease which Providence did not think fit to send you; and simple people "did not like to make themselves ill of their own accord". She triumphed, however, over all obstacles; inoculation, being really found to lengthen life and save complexions, before long became general.

One of the first patients upon whom Lady Mary tried the novelty was her own son, and many considerate people thought it "worthy of observation" that he turned out a scamp. When he ran away from school, the mark of inoculation, then rare, was used to describe him, and after he was recovered, he never did anything which was good. His case seems to have been the common one in which Nature (as we speak) requites herself for the strongheadedness of several generations by the weakness of one. His

father's and his mother's family had been rather able for some generations; the latter remarkably so. But this boy had always a sort of practical imbecility. He was not stupid, but he never did anything right. He exemplified another curious trait of Nature's practice. Mr. Montagu was obstinate, though sensible; Lady Mary was flighty, though clever. Nature combined the defects. Young Edward Montagu was both obstinate and flighty. The only pleasure he can ever have given his parents was the pleasure of *feeling* their own wisdom. He showed that they were right before marriage in not settling the paternal property upon him, for he ran through every shilling he possessed. He was not sensible enough to keep his property, and just not fool enough for the law to take it from him.

After her return from Constantinople, Lady Mary continued to lead the same half-gay and half-literary life as before; but at last she did not like it. Various ingenious inquirers into antiquated *minutiæ* have endeavoured, without success, to discover reasons of detail which might explain her dissatisfaction. They have suggested that some irregular love-affair was unprosperous, and hinted that she and her husband were not on good terms. The love-affair, however, when looked for, cannot be found; and though she and her husband would appear to have been but distantly related, they never had any great quarrel which we know of. Neither seems to have been fitted to give the other much pleasure, and each had the fault of which the other was most impatient. Before marriage Lady Mary had charmed Mr. Montagu, but she had also frightened him; after marriage she frightened, but did not charm him. He was formal and composed; she was flighty and *outrée*. "What *will* she do next?" was doubtless the poor man's daily feeling; and "Will he ever do anything?" was probably also hers. Torpid business, which is always going on, but

which never seems to come to anything, is simply aggravating to a clever woman. Even the least impatient lady can hardly endure a perpetual process for which there is little visible and nothing theatrical to show; and Lady Mary was by no means the least impatient. But there was no abrupt quarrel between the two; and a husband and wife who have lived together more than twenty years can generally manage to continue to live together during a second twenty years. These reasons of detail are scarcely the reasons for Lady Mary's wishing to break away from the life to which she had so long been used. Yet there was clearly some reason, for Lady Mary went abroad, and stayed there during many years.

We believe that the cause was not special and peculiar to the case, but general, and due to the invariable principles of human nature, at all times and everywhere. If historical experience proves anything, it proves that the earth is not adapted for a life of mere intellectual pleasure. The life of a brute on earth, though bad, is possible. It is not even difficult to many persons to destroy the higher part of their nature by a continual excess in sensual pleasure. It is even more easy and possible to dull all the soul and most of the mind by a vapid accumulation of torpid comfort. Many of the middle classes spend their whole lives in a constant series of petty pleasures, and an undeviating pursuit of small material objects. The gross pursuit of pleasure, and the tiresome pursuit of petty comfort, are quite suitable to such "a being as man in such a world as the present one". What is not possible is, to combine the pursuit of pleasure and the enjoyment of comfort with the characteristic pleasures of a strong mind. If you wish for luxury, you must not nourish the inquisitive instinct. The great problems of human life are in the air; they are without us in the life we see, within us in the life we feel. A quick intellect

feels them in a moment. It says, "Why am I here? What is pleasure, that I desire it? What is comfort, that I seek it? What are carpets and tables? What is the lust of the eye? What is the pride of life, that they should satisfy *me?* I was not made for such things. I hate them, because I have liked them; I loathe them, because it seems that there is nothing else for me." An impatient woman's intellect comes to this point in a moment; it says, "Society is good, but I have seen society. What is the use of talking, or hearing *bon-mots?* I have done both till I am tired of doing either. I have laughed till I have no wish to laugh again, and made others laugh till I have hated them for being such fools. As for instruction, I have seen the men of genius of my time; and they tell me nothing,—nothing of what I want to know. They are choked with intellectual frivolities. They cannot say 'whence I came, and whither I go'. What do they know of themselves? It is not from literary people that we can learn anything; more likely, they will copy, or try to copy, the manners of lords, and make ugly love, in bad imitation of those who despise them." Lady Mary felt this, as we believe. She had seen all the world of England, and it did not *satisfy*. She turned abroad, not in pursuit of definite good, nor from fear of particular evil, but from a vague wish for some great change—from a wish to escape from a life which harassed the soul, but did not calm it; which awakened the intellect without answering its questions.

She lived abroad for more than twenty years, at Avignon and Venice and elsewhere; and, during that absence, she wrote the letters which compose the greater part of her works. And there is no denying that they are good letters. The art of note-writing may become classical—it is for the present age to provide models of that sort of composition—but letters have perished. Nobody but a bore now takes

pains enough to make them pleasant; and the only result of a bore's pains is to make them unpleasant. The correspondence of the present day is a continual labour without any visible achievement. The dying penny-a-liner said with emphasis: "That which I have written has perished". We might all say so of the mass of petty letters we write. They are a heap of small atoms, each with some interest individually, but with no interest as a whole; all the items concern us, but they all add up to nothing. In the last century, cultivated people who sat down to write a letter took pains to have something to say, and took pains to say it. The postage was perhaps ninepence; and it would be impudent to make a correspondent pay ninepence for nothing. Still more impudent was it, *after* having made him pay ninepence, to give him the additional pain of making out what was half expressed. People, too, wrote to one another then, not unfrequently, who had long been separated, and who required much explanation and many details to make the life of each intelligible to the other. The correspondence of the nineteenth century is like a series of telegrams with amplified headings. There is not more than one idea; and that idea comes soon, and is soon over. The best correspondence of the last age is rather like a good light article,—in which the points are studiously made,—in which the effort to make them is studiously concealed,—in which a series of selected circumstances is set forth,—in which you feel, but are not told, that the principle of the writer's selection was to make his composition pleasant.

In letter-writing of this kind Lady Mary was very skilful. She has the highest merit of letter-writing—she is concise without being affected. Fluency, which a great orator pronounced to be the curse of orators, is at least equally the curse of writers. There are many people, many ladies especially, who can write letters at any length, in any

number, and at any time. We may be quite sure that the letters so written are not good letters. Composition of any sort implies consideration; you must see where you are going before you can go straight, or can pick your steps as you go. On the other hand, too much consideration is unfavourable to the ease of letter-writing, and perhaps of all writing. A letter too much studied wants flow; it is a museum of hoarded sentences. Each sentence sounds effective; but the whole composition wants vitality. It was written with the memory instead of the mind; and every reader feels the effect, though only the critical reader can detect the cause. Lady Mary understood all this. She said what she had to say in words that were always graphic and always sufficiently good, but she avoided curious felicity. Her expressions seemed choice, but not chosen.

At the end of her life Lady Mary pointed a subordinate but not a useless moral. The masters of mundane ethics observe that "you should stay in the world, or stay out of the world". Lady Mary did neither. She went out and tried to return. Horace Walpole thus describes the result: "Lady Mary Wortley is arrived; I have seen her; I think her avarice, her art, and her vivacity are all increased. Her dress, like her language, is a *galimatias* of several countries; the groundwork rags, and the embroidery nastiness. She needs no cap, no handkerchief, no gown, no petticoat, and no shoes. An old black laced hood represents the first; the fur of a horseman's coat, which replaces the third, serves for the second; a dimity petticoat is deputy and officiates for the fourth; and slippers act the part of the last. When I was at Florence, and she was expected there, we were drawing *sortes Virgilianas* for her; we literally drew

'Insanam vatem aspicies'.[1]

[1] *Æneid*, iii., 443.

It would have been a stranger prophecy now even than it was then." There is a description of what the favourite of society becomes after leaving it for years, and after indulging eccentricities for years! There is a commentary on the blunder of exposing yourself in your old age to young people, to whom you have always been a tradition and a name! Horace Walpole doubtless painted up a few trivialities a little. But one of the traits is true. Lady Mary lived before the age in which people waste half their lives in washing the whole of their persons.

Lady Mary did not live long after her return to England. Horace Walpole's letter is written on the 2nd February, 1762, and she died on the 21st August in the same year. Her husband had died just before her return, and perhaps, after so many years, she would not have returned unless he had done so. *Requiescat in pace;* for she quarrelled all her life.

MR. CLOUGH'S POEMS.[1]

(1862.)

No one can be more rigid than we are in our rules[2] as to the publication of remains and memoirs. It is very natural that the friends of a cultivated man who seemed about to do something, but who died before he did it, should desire to publish to the world the grounds of their faith, and the little symptoms of his immature excellence. But though they act very naturally, they act very unwisely. In the present state of the world there are too many half-excellent people: there is a superfluity of persons who have all the knowledge, all the culture, all the requisite taste,—all the tools, in short, of achievement, but who are deficient in the latent impulse and secret vigour which alone can turn such instruments to account. They have all the outward and visible signs of future success; they want the invisible spirit, which can only be demonstrated by trial and victory. Nothing, therefore, is more tedious or more worthless than the posthumous delineation of the possible successes of one who did not succeed. The dreadful remains of nice young persons which abound among us prove almost nothing as to the future fate of those persons, if they had survived. We can only tell that any one is a man of genius by his having produced some work of genius. Young men must

[1] *Poems.* By Arthur Hugh Clough, sometime Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford. With a Memoir. Macmillan.

[2] This essay was originally published in *The National Review.*

practise themselves in youthful essays; and to some of their friends these may seem works not only of fair promise, but of achieved excellence. The cold world of critics and readers will not, however, think so; that world well understands the distinction between promise and performance, and sees that these laudable *juvenilia* differ from good books as much as legitimate bills of exchange differ from actual cash.

If we did not believe that Mr. Clough's poems, or at least several of them, had real merit, not as promissory germs, but as completed performances, it would not seem to us to be within our province to notice them. Nor, if Mr. Clough were now living among us, would he wish us to do so. The marked peculiarity, and, so to say, the *flavour* of his mind, was a sort of truthful scepticism, which made him anxious never to overstate his own assurance of anything; which disinclined him to overrate the doings of his friends; and which absolutely compelled him to underrate his own past writings, as well as his capability for future literary success. He could not have borne to have his poems reviewed with "nice remarks" and sentimental epithets of insincere praise. He was equal to his precept:—

> "Where are the great, whom thou wouldst wish to praise thee?
> Where are the pure, whom thou wouldst choose to love thee?
> Where are the brave, to stand supreme above thee,
> Whose high commands would cheer, whose chiding raise thee?
> Seek, seeker, in thyself; submit to find
> In the stones, bread, and life in the blank mind."

To offer petty praise and posthumous compliments to a stoic of this temper, is like buying sugar-plums for St. Simon Stylites. We venture to write an article on Mr. Clough, because we believe that his poems depict an intellect in a state which is always natural "to such a being as man in such a world as the present," which is peculiarly natural to us just now; and because we believe that many of these

poems are very remarkable for true vigour and artistic excellence, although they certainly have defects and shortcomings, which would have been lessened, if not removed, if their author had lived longer and had written more.

In a certain sense there are two great opinions about everything. There are two about the universe itself. The world as we know it is this. There is a vast, visible, indisputable sphere, of which we never lose the consciousness, of which no one seriously denies the existence, about the most important part of which most people agree tolerably and fairly. On the other hand, there is the invisible world, about which men are not agreed at all, which all but the faintest minority admit to exist somehow and somewhere, but as to the nature or locality of which there is no efficient popular demonstration, no such compulsory argument as will *force* the unwilling conviction of any one disposed to denial. As our minds rise, as our knowledge enlarges, as our wisdom grows, as our instincts deepen, our conviction of this invisible world is daily strengthened, and our estimate of its nature is continually improved. But—and this is the most striking peculiarity of the whole subject—the more we improve, the higher we rise, the nobler we conceive the unseen world which is in us and about us, in which we live and move, the more unlike that world becomes to the world which we *do* see. The divinities of Olympus were in a very plain and intelligible sense part and parcel of this earth; they were better specimens than could be found below, but they belonged to extant species; they were better editions of visible existences; they were like the heroines whom young men imagine after seeing the young ladies of their vicinity—they were better and handsomer, but they were of the same sort; they had never been seen, but they might have been seen any day. So too of the God with whom the Patriarch wrestled: he

might have been wrestled with even if he was not; he was that sort of person. If we contrast with these the God of whom Christ speaks—the God who has not been seen at any time, whom no man hath seen or can see, who is infinite in nature, whose ways are past finding out—the transition is palpable. We have passed from gods—from an invisible world, which is similar to, which is a *natural appendix* to, the world in which we live—and we have come to believe in an invisible world, which is altogether unlike that which we see, which is certainly not opposed to our experience, but is altogether beyond and unlike our experience; which belongs to another set of things altogether; which is, as we speak, transcendental. The "possible" of early barbarism is like the reality of early barbarism; the "may be," the "great perhaps," of late civilisation is most unlike the earth, whether barbaric or civilised.

Two opinions as to the universe naturally result from this fundamental contrast. There are plenty of minds, like that of Voltaire, who have simply no sense or perception of the invisible world whatever, who have no ear for religion, who are in the technical sense unconverted, whom no conceivable process could convert without altering what to bystanders and ordinary observers is their identity. They are, as a rule, acute, sensible, discerning, and humane; but the first observation which the most ordinary person would make as to them is, that they are "limited"; they understand palpable existence; they elaborate it, and beautify and improve it; but an admiring bystander, who can do none of these things, who can beautify nothing, who, if he tried, would only make what is ugly uglier, is conscious of a latent superiority, which he can hardly help connecting with his apparent inferiority. We cannot write Voltaire's sentences; we cannot make things as clear as

he made them; but we do not much care for our deficiency. Perhaps we think "things ought not to be so plain as all that". There is a hidden, secret, unknown side to this universe, which these picturesque painters of the visible, these many-handed manipulators of the palpable, are not aware of, which would spoil their dexterity if it were displayed on them. Sleep-walkers can tread safely on the very edge of a precipice; but those who see, cannot. On the other hand, there are those whose minds have not only been converted, but in some sense *inverted*. They are so occupied with the invisible world as to be absorbed in it entirely; they have no true conception of that which stands plainly before them; they never look coolly at it, and are cross with those who do; they are wrapt up in their own faith as to an unseen existence; they rush upon mankind with "Ah, there it is! there it is!—don't you see it?" and so incur the ridicule of an age.

The best of us try to avoid both fates. We strive, more or less, to "make the best of both worlds". We know that the invisible world cannot be duly discerned, or perfectly appreciated. We know that we see as in a glass darkly; but still we look on the glass. We frame to ourselves some image which we know to be incomplete, which probably is in part untrue, which we try to improve day by day, of which we do not deny the defects,—but which nevertheless is our "all"; which we hope, when the accounts are taken, may be found not utterly *unlike* the unknown reality. This is, as it seems, the best religion for finite beings, living, if we may say so, on the very edge of two dissimilar worlds, on the very line on which the infinite, unfathomable sea surges up, and just where the queer little bay of this world ends. We count the pebbles on the shore, and image to ourselves as best we may the secrets of the great deep.

There are, however, some minds (and of these Mr. Clough's was one) which will not accept what appears to be an intellectual destiny. They struggle against the limitations of mortality, and will not condescend to use the natural and needful aids of human thought. They will not *make their image*. They struggle after an "actual abstract". They feel, and they rightly feel, that every image, every translation, every mode of conception by which the human mind tries to place before itself the Divine mind, is imperfect, halting, changing. They feel, from their own experience, that there is no one such mode of representation which will suit their own minds at all times, and they smile with bitterness at the notion that they could contrive an image which will suit all other minds. They could not become fanatics or missionaries, or even common preachers, without forfeiting their natural dignity, and foregoing their very essence. To cry in the streets, to uplift their voice in Israel, to be "pained with hot thoughts," to be "preachers of a dream," would reverse their whole cast of mind. It would metamorphose them into something which omits every striking trait for which they were remarked, and which contains every trait for which they were not remarked. On the other hand, it would be quite as opposite to their whole nature to become followers of Voltaire. No one knows more certainly and feels more surely that there is an invisible world, than those very persons who decline to make an image or representation of it, who shrink with a nervous horror from every such attempt when it is made by any others. All this inevitably leads to what common, practical people term a "curious" sort of mind. You do not know how to describe these "universal negatives," as they seem to be. They will not fall into place in the ordinary intellectual world anyhow. If you offer them any known religion, they "won't have that"; if you offer them no religion, they

will not have that either; if you ask them to accept a new and as yet unrecognised religion, they altogether refuse to do so. They seem not only to believe in an "unknown God," but in a God whom no man can ever know. Mr. Clough has expressed, in a sort of lyric, what may be called their essential religion:—

"O Thou whose image in the shrine
Of human spirits dwells divine!
Which from that precinct once conveyed,
To be to outer day displayed,
Doth vanish, part, and leave behind
Mere blank and void of empty mind,
Which wilful fancy seeks in vain
With casual shapes to fill again'

"O Thou, that in our bosom's shrine
Dost dwell, unknown because divine!
I thought to speak, I thought to say,
'The light is here,' 'Behold the way,'
'The voice was thus,' and 'Thus the word,'
And 'Thus I saw,' and 'That I heard,'—
But from the lips that half essayed
The imperfect utterance fell unmade.

"O Thou, in that mysterious shrine
Enthroned, as I may say, divine!
I will not frame one thought of what
Thou mayest either be or not.
I will not prate of 'thus' and 'so,'
And be profane with 'yes' or 'no,'
Enough that in our soul and heart
Thou, whatso'er Thou mayest be, art."

It was exceedingly natural that Mr. Clough should incline to some such creed as this, with his character and in his circumstances. He had by nature, probably, an exceedingly real mind, in the good sense of that expression and the bad sense. The actual visible world as it was, and as he saw

it, exercised over him a compulsory influence. The hills among which he had wandered, the cities he had visited, the friends whom he knew,—these were his world. Many minds of the poetic sort easily melt down these palpable facts into some impalpable ether of their own. To such a mind as Shelley's the "solid earth" is an immaterial fact; it is not even a cumbersome difficulty—it is a preposterous imposture. Whatever may exist, all that *clay* does not exist; it would be too absurd to think so. Common persons can make nothing of this dreaminess; and Mr. Clough, though superficial observers set him down as a dreamer, could not make much either. To him, as to the mass of men, the vulgar, outward world was a primitive fact. "Taxes *is* true," as the miser said. Reconcile what you have to say with green peas, for green peas are certain; such was Mr. Clough's idea. He could not dissolve the world into credible ideas and then believe those ideas, as many poets have done. He could not catch up a creed as ordinary men do. He had a *straining*, inquisitive, critical mind; he scrutinised every idea before he took it in; he did not allow the moral forces of life to act as they should; he was not content to gain a belief "by going on living". He said,

> "*Action will furnish belief;* but will that belief be the true one? This is the point, you know."

He felt the coarse facts of the plain world so thoroughly that he could not readily take in anything which did not seem in accordance with them and like them. And what common idea of the invisible world seems in the least in accordance with them or like them?

A journal-writer in one of his poems has expressed this:—

"Comfort has come to me here in the dreary streets of the city,
Comfort—how do you think?—with a barrel-organ to bring it.
Moping along the streets, and cursing my day as I wandered,
All of a sudden my ear met the sound of an English psalm-tune.
Comfort me it did, till indeed I was very near crying.
Ah, there is some great truth, partial very likely, but needful,
Lodged, I am strangely sure, in the tones of the English psalm-tune:
Comfort it was at least; and I must take without question
Comfort, however it come, in the dreary streets of the city.

"What with trusting myself, and seeking support from within me,
Almost I could believe I had gained a religious assurance,
Formed in my own poor soul a great moral basis to rest on.
Ah, but indeed I see, I feel it factitious entirely;
I refuse, reject, and put it utterly from me;
I will look straight out, see things, not try to evade them;
Fact shall be fact for me, and the Truth the Truth as ever,
Flexible, changeable, vague, and multiform, and doubtful.—
Off, and depart to the void, thou subtle, fanatical tempter!" [1]

Mr. Clough's fate in life had been such as to exaggerate this naturally peculiar temper. He was a pupil of Arnold's; one of his best, most susceptible and favourite pupils. Some years since there was much doubt and interest as to the effect of Arnold's teaching. His sudden death, so to say, cut his life in the middle, and opened a tempting discussion as to the effect of his teaching when those taught by him should have become men and not boys. The interest which his own character then awakened, and must always awaken, stimulated the discussion, and there was much doubt about it. But now we need doubt no longer. The Rugby "men" are *real* men, and the world can pronounce its judgment. Perhaps that part of the world which cares for such things has pronounced it. Dr. Arnold was almost indisputably an admirable master for a common English boy,—the small, apple-eating animal whom we

[1] "Amours de Voyage," v. 2.

know. He worked, he pounded, if the phrase may be used, into the boy a belief, or at any rate a floating, confused conception, that there are great subjects, that there are strange problems, that knowledge has an indefinite value, that life is a serious and solemn thing. The influence of Arnold's teaching upon the majority of his pupils was probably very vague, but very good. To impress on the ordinary Englishman a general notion of the importance of what is intellectual and the reality of what is supernatural, is the greatest benefit which can be conferred upon him. The common English mind is too coarse, sluggish, and worldly to take such lessons too much to heart. It is improved by them in many ways, and is not harmed by them at all. But there are a few minds which are very likely to think too much of such things. A susceptible, serious, intellectual boy may be injured by the incessant inculcation of the awfulness of life and the magnitude of great problems. It is not desirable to take this world too much *au sérieux;* most persons will not; and the one in a thousand who will, should not. Mr. Clough was one of those who will. He was one of Arnold's favourite pupils, because he gave heed so much to Arnold's teaching; and exactly because he gave heed to it, was it bad for him. He required quite another sort of teaching: to be told to take things easily; not to try to be wise overmuch; to be "something beside critical"; to go on living quietly and obviously, and see what truth would come to him. Mr. Clough had to his latest years what may be noticed in others of Arnold's disciples,—a fatigued way of looking at great subjects. It seemed as if he had been put into them before his time, had seen through them, heard all which could be said about them, had been bored by them, and had come to want something else.

A still worse consequence was, that the faith, the doctrinal teaching which Arnold impressed on the youths about

him, was one personal to Arnold himself, which arose out of the peculiarities of his own character, which can only be explained by them. As soon as an inquisitive mind was thrown into a new intellectual atmosphere, and was obliged to naturalise itself in it, to consider the creed it had learned with reference to the facts which it encountered and met, much of that creed must fade away. There were inevitable difficulties in it, which only the personal peculiarities of Arnold prevented his perceiving, and which every one else must soon perceive. The new intellectual atmosphere into which Mr. Clough was thrown was peculiarly likely to have this disenchanting effect. It was the Oxford of Father Newman; an Oxford utterly different from Oxford as it is, or from the same place as it had been twenty years before. A complete estimate of that remarkable thinker cannot be given here; it would be no easy task even now, many years after his influence has declined, nor is it necessary for the present purpose. Two points are quite certain of Father Newman, and they are the only two which are at present material. He was undeniably a consummate master of the difficulties of the creeds of other men. With a profoundly religious organisation which was hard to satisfy, with an imagination which could not help setting before itself simply and exactly what different creeds would come to and mean in life, with an analysing and most subtle intellect which was sure to detect the weak point in an argument if a weak point there was, with a manner at once grave and fascinating,—he was a nearly perfect religious disputant, whatever may be his deficiencies as a religious teacher. The most accomplished theologian of another faith would have looked anxiously to the joints of his harness before entering the lists with an adversary so prompt and keen. To suppose that a youth fresh from Arnold's teaching, with a hasty faith in a scheme of thought radically inconsistent, should be

able to endure such an encounter, was absurd. Arnold flattered himself that he was a principal opponent of Mr. Newman; but he was rather a principal fellow-labourer. There was but one quality in a common English boy which would have enabled him to resist such a reasoner as Mr. Newman. We have a heavy apathy on exciting topics, which enables us to leave dilemmas unsolved, to forget difficulties, to go about our pleasure or our business, and to leave the reasoner to pursue his logic: "anyhow he is very *long*"—*that* we comprehend. But it was exactly this happy apathy, this commonplace indifference, that Arnold prided himself on removing. He objected strenuously to Mr. Newman's creed, but he prepared anxiously the very soil in which that creed was sure to grow. A multitude of such minds as Mr. Clough's, from being Arnoldites, became Newmanites.

A second quality in Mr. Newman is at least equally clear. He was much better skilled in finding out the difficulties of other men's creeds than in discovering and stating a distinct basis for his own. In most of his characteristic works he does not even attempt it. His argument is essentially an argument *ad hominem;* an argument addressed to the present creed of the person with whom he is reasoning. He says: "Give up what you hold already, or accept what I now say; for that which you already hold involves it". Even in books where he is especially called on to deal with matters of first principle, the result is unsatisfactory. We have heard it said that he has in later life accounted for the argumentative vehemence of his book *against* the Church of Rome by saying: "I did it as a duty; I *put* myself into a state of mind to write that book". And this is just the impression which his arguments give. His elementary principles seem *made*, not born. Very likely he would admit the fact, yet defend his practice. He would say: "Such a being as man is, in such a world as this is, *must* do so; he must

make a venture for his religion; he may see a greater probability that the doctrine of the Church is true than that it is false; he may see before he believes in her that she has greater evidence than any other creed; but he must do the rest for himself. *By means of his will* he must put himself into a new state of mind; he must cast in his lot with the Church here and hereafter; *then* his belief will gradually strengthen; he will in time become sure of what she says." He undoubtedly, in the time of his power, persuaded many young men to try some such process as this. The weaker, the more credulous, and the more fervent, were able to persevere; those who had not distinct perceptions of real truth, who were dreamy and fanciful by nature, persevered without difficulty. But Mr. Clough could not do so; he felt it was "something factitious".[1] He began to speak of the "ruinous force of the will,"[2] and "our terrible notions of duty".[3] He ceased to be a Newmanite.

Thus Mr. Clough's career and life were exactly those most likely to develop and foster a morbid peculiarity of his intellect. He had, as we have explained, by nature an unusual difficulty in forming a creed as to the unseen world; he could not get the visible world out of his head; his strong grasp of plain facts and obvious matters was a difficulty to him. Too easily one great teacher inculcated a remarkable creed; then another great teacher took it away; then this second teacher made him believe for a time some of his own artificial faith; then it would not do. He fell back on that vague, impalpable, unembodied religion which we have attempted to describe.

He has himself given in a poem,[4] now first published, a very remarkable description of this curious state of mind. He has prefixed to it the characteristic motto, "*Il doutait de tout, même de l'amour*". It is the delineation of a certain

[1] "Amours de Voyage." [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*

love-passage in the life of a hesitating young gentleman, who was in Rome at the time of the revolution of 1848; who could not make up his mind about the revolution, who could not make up his mind whether he liked Rome, who could not make up his mind whether he liked the young lady, who let her go away without him, who went in pursuit of her, and could not make out which way to look for her,—who, in fine, has some sort of religion, but cannot himself tell what it is. The poem was not published in the author's lifetime, and there are some lines which we are persuaded he would have further polished, and some parts which he would have improved, if he had seen them in print. It is written in conversational hexameters, in a tone of semi-satire and half-belief. Part of the commencement is a good example of them :—

" Rome disappoints me much ; I hardly as yet understand, but
Rubbishy seems the word that most exactly would suit it.
All the foolish destructions, and all the sillier savings,
All the incongruous things of past incompatible ages,
Seem to be treasured up here to make fools of present and future.
Would to heaven the old Goths had made a cleaner sweep of it!
Would to heaven some new ones would come and destroy these churches!
However, one can live in Rome as also in London.
Rome is better than London, because it is other than London.
It is a blessing, no doubt, to be rid, at least for a time, of
All one's friends and relations,—yourself (forgive me!) included,—
All the *assujettissement* of having been what one has been,
What one thinks one is, or thinks that others suppose one;
Yet, in despite of all, we turn like fools to the English.
Vernon has been my fate; who is here the same that you knew him,—
Making the tour, it seems, with friends of the name of Trevellyn.

" Rome disappoints me still; but I shrink and adapt myself to it.
Somehow a tyrannous sense of a superincumbent oppression
Still, wherever I go, accompanies ever, and makes me
Feel like a tree (shall I say?) buried under a ruin of brickwork.

Rome, believe me, my friend, is like its own Monte Testaceo,
Merely a marvellous mass of broken and castaway wine-pots.
Ye Gods! what do I want with this rubbish of ages departed,
Things that Nature abhors, the experiments that she has failed in?
What do I find in the Forum? An archway and two or three pillars.
Well, but St. Peter's? Alas, Bernini has filled it with sculpture!
No one can cavil, I grant, at the size of the great Coliseum.
Doubtless the notion of grand and capacious and massive amusement,
This the old Romans had; but tell me, is this an idea?
Yet of solidity much, but of splendour little is extant:
'Brickwork I found thee, and marble I left thee!' their Emperor vaunted;
'Marble I thought thee, and brickwork I find thee!' the Tourist may answer."

As he goes on he likes Rome rather better, but hazards the following imprecation on the Jesuits:—

"Luther, they say, was unwise; he didn't see how things were going;
Luther was foolish,—but, O great God! what call you Ignatius?
O my tolerant soul, be still! but you talk of barbarians,
Alaric, Attila, Genseric;—why, they came, they killed, they
Ravaged, and went on their way; but these vile, tyrannous Spaniards,
These are here still,—how long, O ye heavens, in the country of Dante?
These, that fanaticised Europe, which now can forget them, release not
This, their choicest of prey, this Italy; here you see them,—
Here, with emasculate pupils and gimcrack churches of Gesù,
Pseudo-learning and lies, confessional-boxes and postures,—
Here, with metallic beliefs and regimental devotions,—
Here, overcrusting with slime, perverting, defacing, debasing
Michael Angelo's dome, that had hung the Pantheon in heaven,
Raphael's Joys and Graces, and thy clear stars, Galileo!"

The plot of the poem is very simple, and certainly is not very exciting. The moving force, as in most novels of verse or prose, is the love of the hero for the heroine; but this love assuredly is not of a very impetuous and overpowering character. The interest of this story is precisely that it is not overpowering. The over-intellectual hero, over-anxious to be composed, will not submit himself to his love; over-

fearful of what is voluntary and factitious, he will not make an effort and cast in his lot with it. He states his view of the subject better than we can state it:—

"I am in love, meantime, you think; no doubt you would think so.
I am in love, you say, with those letters, of course, you would say so.
I am in love, you declare. I think not so; yet I grant you
It is a pleasure indeed to converse with this girl. Oh, rare gift,
Rare felicity, this! she can talk in a rational way, can
Speak upon subjects that really are matters of mind and of thinking,
Yet in perfection retain her simplicity; never, one moment,
Never, however you urge it, however you tempt her, consents to
Step from ideas and fancies and loving sensations to those vain
Conscious understandings that vex the minds of mankind.
No, though she talk, it is music; her fingers desert not the keys; 'tis
Song, though you hear in the song the articulate vocables sounded,
Syllables singly and sweetly the words of melodious meaning.
I am in love, you say; I do not think so, exactly.
There are two different kinds, I believe, of human attraction:
One which simply disturbs, unsettles, and makes you uneasy,
And another that poises, retains, and fixes and holds you.
I have no doubt, for myself, in giving my voice for the latter.
I do not wish to be moved, but growing where I was growing,
There more truly to grow, to live where as yet I had languished.
I do not like being moved: for the will is excited; and action
Is a most dangerous thing; I tremble for something factitious,
Some malpractice of heart and illegitimate process;
We are so prone to these things, with our terrible notions of duty.
Ah, let me look, let me watch, let me wait, unhurried, unprompted!
Bid me not venture on aught that could alter or end what is present!
Say not, Time flies, and Occasion, that never returns, is departing!
Drive me not out, ye ill angels with fiery swords, from my Eden,
Waiting, and watching, and looking! Let love be its own inspiration!
Shall not a voice, if a voice there must be, from the airs that environ,
Yea, from the conscious heavens, without our knowledge or effort,
Break into audible words? And love be its own inspiration?"

It appears, however, that even this hesitating hero would have come to the point at last. In a book, at least, the hero

has nothing else to do. The inevitable restrictions of a pretty story hem him in; to wind up the plot, he must either propose or die, and usually he prefers proposing. Mr. Claude —for such is the name of Mr. Clough's hero—is evidently on his road towards the inevitable alternative, when his fate intercepts him by the help of a person who meant nothing less. There is a sister of the heroine, who is herself engaged to a rather quick person, and who cannot make out any one's conducting himself differently from her George Vernon. She writes:—

"Mr. Claude, you must know, is behaving a little bit better;
He and Papa are great friends; but he really is too *shilly-shally*,—
So unlike George! Yet I hope that the matter is going on fairly.
I shall, however, get George, before he goes, to say something.
Dearest Louise, how delightful to bring young people together!"

As the heroine says, "dear Georgina" wishes for nothing so much as to show her adroitness. George Vernon does interfere, and Mr. Claude may describe for himself the change it makes in his fate:—

"Tibur is beautiful too, and the orchard slopes, and the Anio
Falling, falling yet, to the ancient lyrical cadence;
Tibur and Anio's tide; and cool from Lucretilis ever,
With the Digentian stream, and with the Bandusian fountain,
Folded in Sabine recesses, the valley and villa of Horace:—
So not seeing I sung; so seeing and listening say I,
Here as I sit by the stream, as I gaze at the cell of the Sibyl,
Here with Albunea's home and the grove of Tiburnus beside me;[1]
Tivoli beautiful is, and musical, O Teverone,
Dashing from mountain to plain, thy parted impetuous waters!
Tivoli's waters and rocks; and fair under Monte Gennaro,
(Haunt even yet, I must think, as I wander and gaze, of the shadows,

[1] "——domus Albuneæ resonantis,
Et præceps Anio, et Tiburni lucus, et uda
Mobilibus pomaria rivis."

Faded and pale, yet immortal, of Faunus, the Nymphs, and the Graces,)
Fair in itself, and yet fairer with human completing creations,
Folded in Sabine recesses, the valley and villa of Horace :—
So not seeing I sung ; so now—Nor seeing, nor hearing,
Neither by waterfall lulled, nor folded in sylvan embraces,
Neither by cell of the Sibyl, nor stepping the Monte Gennaro,
Seated on Anio's bank, nor sipping Bandusian waters,
But on Montorio's height, looking down on the tile-clad streets, the
Cupolas, crosses and domes, the bushes and kitchen-gardens,
Which, by the grace of the Tibur, proclaim themselves Rome of the Roman,—
But on Montorio's height, looking forth to the vapoury mountains,
Cheating the prisoner Hope with illusions of vision and fancy, –
But on Montorio's height, with these weary soldiers by me,
Waiting till Oudinot enter, to reinstate Pope and Tourist.

. . . . . .

Yes, on Montorio's height for a last farewell of the city,—
So it appears ; though then I was quite uncertain about it.
So, however, it was. And now to explain the proceeding.
I was to go, as I told you, I think, with the people to Florence.
Only the day before, the foolish family Vernon
Made some uneasy remarks, as we walked to our lodging together,
As to intentions, forsooth, and so forth. I was astounded,
Horrified quite ; and obtaining just then, as it happened, an offer
(No common favour) of seeing the great Ludovisi collection,
Why, I made this a pretence, and wrote that they must excuse me.
How could I go? Great Heavens ! to conduct a permitted flirtation.
Under those vulgar eyes, the observed of such observers !
Well, but I now, by a series of fine diplomatic inquiries,
Find from a sort of relation, a good and sensible woman,
Who is remaining at Rome with a brother too ill for removal,
That it was wholly unsanctioned, unknown,—not, I think, by Georgina.
She, however, ere this,—and that is the best of the story,—
She and the Vernon, thank Heaven, are wedded and gone—honeymooning.
So—on Montorio's height for a last farewell of the city.
Tibur I have not seen, nor the lakes that of old I had dreamt of;
Tibur I shall not see, nor Anio's waters, nor deep en-
Folded in Sabine recesses the valley and villa of Horace ;

Tibur I shall not see;—but something better I shall see.
Twice I have tried before, and failed in getting the horses;
Twice I have tried and failed: this time it shall not be a failure."

But, of course, he does not reach Florence till the heroine and her family are gone; and he hunts after them through North Italy, not very skilfully, and then he returns to Rome; and he reflects, certainly not in a very dignified or heroic manner:—

"I cannot stay at Florence, not even to wait for a letter.
Galleries only oppress me. Remembrance of hope I had cherished
(Almost more than as hope, when I passed through Florence the first time)
Lies like a sword in my soul. I am more a coward than ever,
Chicken-hearted, past thought. The *cafés* and waiters distress me.
All is unkind, and, alas! I am ready for any one's kindness.
Oh, I knew it of old, and knew it, I thought, to perfection,
If there is any one thing in the world to preclude all kindness,
It is the need of it,—it is this sad, self-defeating dependence.
Why is this, Eustace? Myself, were I stronger, I think I could tell you.
But it is odd when it comes. So plumb I the deeps of depression,
Daily in deeper, and find no support, no will, no purpose.
All my old strengths are gone. And yet I shall have to do something
Ah, the key of our life, that passes all wards, opens all locks,
Is not *I will* but *I must*. I must,—I must,—and I do it.

"After all, do I know that I really cared so about her?
Do whatever I will, I cannot call up her image;
For when I close my eyes, I see, very likely St. Peter's,
Or the Pantheon façade, or Michael Angelo's figures,
Or, at a wish, when I please, the Alban hills and the Forum,—
But that face, those eyes,—ah no, never anything like them;
Only, try as I will, a sort of featureless outline,
And a pale blank orb, which no recollection will add to.
After all, perhaps there was something factitious about it;
I have had pain, it is true: I have wept, and so have the actors.

"At the last moment I have your letter, for which I was waiting;
I have taken my place, and see no good in inquiries.
Do nothing more, good Eustace, I pray you. It only will vex me.
Take no measures. Indeed, should we meet, I could not be certain;
All might be changed, you know. Or perhaps there was nothing to be changed.
It is a curious history, this; and yet I foresaw it;
I could have told it before. The Fates, it is clear, are against us;
For it is certain enough I met with the people you mention;
They were at Florence the day I returned there, and spoke to me even;
Stayed a week, saw me often; departed, and whither I know not.
Great is Fate, and is best. I believe in Providence partly.
What is ordained is right, and all that happens is ordered.
Ah, no, that isn't it. But yet I retain my conclusion.
I will go where I am led, and will not dictate to the chances.
Do nothing more, I beg. If you love me, forbear interfering."

And the heroine, like a sensible, quiet girl, sums up:—

"You have heard nothing; of course, I know you can have heard nothing.
Ah, well, more than once I have broken my purpose, and sometimes,
Only too often, have looked for the little lake-steamer to bring him.
But it is only fancy,—I do not really expect it.
Oh, and you see I know so exactly how he would take it:
Finding the chances prevail against meeting again, he would banish
Forthwith every thought of the poor little possible hope, which
I myself could not help, perhaps, thinking only too much of;
He would resign himself, and go. I see it exactly.
So I also submit, although in a different manner.
Can you not really come? We go very shortly to England."

And there, let us hope, she found a more satisfactory lover and husband.

The same defect which prevented Mr. Claude from obtaining his bride will prevent this poem from obtaining universal popularity. The public like stories which come to something; Mr. Arnold teaches that a great poem must

be founded on a great action, and this one is founded on a long inaction. But Art has many mansions. Many poets, whose cast of thought unfits them for very diffused popularity, have yet a concentrated popularity which suits them and which lasts. Henry Taylor has wisely said "that a poet does not deserve the name who would not rather be read a thousand times by one man, than a single time by a thousand". This repeated perusal, this testing by continual repetition and close contact, is the very test of intellectual poetry; unless such poetry can identify itself with our nature, and dissolve itself into our constant thought, it is nothing, or less than nothing; it is an ineffectual attempt to confer a rare pleasure; it teases by reminding us of that pleasure, and tires by the effort which it demands from us. But if a poem really possesses this capacity of intellectual absorption—if it really is in matter of fact accepted, apprehended, delighted in, and retained by a large number of cultivated and thoughtful minds,—its non-recognition by what is called the public is no more against it than its non-recognition by the coal-heavers. The half-educated and busy crowd, whom we call the public, have no more right to impose their limitations on highly educated and meditative thinkers, than the uneducated and yet more numerous crowd have to impose their still narrower limitations on the half-educated. The coal-heaver will not read any books whatever; the mass of men will not read an intellectual poem: it can hardly ever be otherwise. But timid thinkers must not dread to have a secret and rare faith. But little deep poetry is very popular, and *no* severe art. Such poetry as Mr. Clough's, especially, can never be so; its subjects would forbid it, even if its treatment were perfect: but it may have a better fate; it may have a tenacious hold on the solitary, the meditative, and the calm. It is this which Mr. Clough would have wished; he did not

desire to be liked by "inferior people"—at least he would have distrusted any poem of his own which they did like.

The artistic skill of these poems, especially of the poem from which we have extracted so much, and of a long vacation pastoral published in the Highlands, is often excellent, and occasionally fails when you least expect it. There was an odd peculiarity in Mr. Clough's mind; you never could tell whether it was that he would not show himself to the best advantage, or whether he *could* not; it is certain that he very often did not, whether in life or in books. His intellect moved with a great difficulty, and it had a larger inertia than any other which we have ever known. Probably there was an awkwardness born with him, and his shyness and pride prevented him from curing that awkwardness as most men would have done. He felt he might fail, and he knew that he hated to fail. He neglected, therefore, many of the thousand petty trials which fashion and form the accomplished man of the world. Accordingly, when at last he wanted to do something, or was obliged to attempt something, he had occasionally a singular difficulty. He could not get his matter out of him.

In poetry he had a further difficulty, arising from perhaps an over-cultivated taste. He was so good a disciple of Wordsworth, he hated so thoroughly the common sing-song metres of Moore and Byron, that he was apt to try to write what will seem to many persons to have scarcely a metre at all. It is quite true that the metre of intellectual poetry should not be so pretty as that of songs, or so plain and impressive as that of vigorous passion. The rhythm should pervade it and animate it, but should not protrude itself upon the surface, or intrude itself upon the attention. It should be a latent charm, though a real one. Yet, though this doctrine is true, it is nevertheless a dangerous doctrine. Most writers need the strict fetters of familiar

metre; as soon as they are emancipated from this, they fancy that *any* words of theirs are metrical. If a man will read any expressive and favourite words of his own often enough, he will come to believe that they are rhythmical; probably they have a rhythm as he reads them; but no notation of pauses and accents could tell the reader how to read them in that manner; and when read in any other mode they may be prose itself. Some of Mr. Clough's early poems, which are placed at the beginning of this volume, are perhaps examples, more or less, of this natural self-delusion. Their writer could read them as verse, but that was scarcely his business; and the common reader fails.

Of one metre, however, the hexameter, we believe the most accomplished judges, and also common readers, agree that Mr. Clough possessed a very peculiar mastery. Perhaps he first showed in English its *flexibility*. Whether any consummate poem of great length and sustained dignity can be written in this metre, and in our language, we do not know. Until a great poet has written his poem, there are commonly no lack of plausible arguments that seem to prove he cannot write it; but Mr. Clough has certainly shown that, in the hands of a skilful and animated artist, it is capable of adapting itself to varied descriptions of life and manners, to noble sentiments, and to changing thoughts. It is perhaps the most flexible of English metres. Better than any others, it changes from grave to gay without desecrating what should be solemn, or disenchanting that which should be graceful. And Mr. Clough was the first to prove this, by writing a noble poem, in which it was done.

In one principal respect Mr. Clough's two poems in hexameters, and especially the Roman one, from which we made so many extracts, are very excellent. Somehow or other he makes you understand what the people of whom

he is writing precisely were. You may object to the means, but you cannot deny the result. By fate he was thrown into a vortex of theological and metaphysical speculation, but his genius was better suited to be the spectator of a more active and moving scene. The play of mind upon mind; the contrasted view which contrasted minds take of great subjects; the odd irony of life which so often thrusts into conspicuous places exactly what no one would expect to find in those places,—these were his subjects. Under happy circumstances, he might have produced on such themes something which the mass of readers would have greatly liked; as it is, he has produced a little which meditative readers will much value, and which they will long remember.

Of Mr. Clough's character it would be out of place to say anything, except in so far as it elucidates his poems. The sort of conversation for which he was most remarkable rises again in the "Amours de Voyage," and gives them, to those who knew him in life, a very peculiar charm. It would not be exact to call the best lines a pleasant cynicism; for cynicism has a bad name, and the ill-nature and other offensive qualities which have given it that name were utterly out of Mr. Clough's way. Though without much fame, he had no envy. But he had a strong realism. He saw what it is considered cynical to see—the absurdities of many persons, the pomposities of many creeds, the splendid zeal with which missionaries rush on to teach what they do not know, the wonderful earnestness with which most incomplete solutions of the universe are thrust upon us as complete and satisfying. "*Le fond de la Providence*," says the French novelist, "*c'est l'ironie*." Mr. Clough would not have said that; but he knew what it meant, and what was the portion of truth contained in it. Undeniably this *is* an *odd* world, whether it should have been so or no; and all our

speculations upon it should begin with some admission of its strangeness and singularity. The habit of dwelling on such thoughts as these will not of itself make a man happy, and may make unhappy one who is inclined to be so. Mr. Clough in his time felt more than most men the weight of the unintelligible world; but such thoughts make an instructive man. Several survivors may think they owe much to Mr. Clough's quiet question, "Ah, then, you think—?" Many pretending creeds and many wonderful demonstrations, passed away before that calm inquiry. He had a habit of putting your own doctrine concisely before you, so that you might see what it came to, and that you did not like it. Even now that he is gone, some may feel the recollection of his society a check on unreal theories and half-mastered thoughts. Let us part from him in his own words:—

"Some future day, when what is now is not,
When all old faults and follies are forgot
And thoughts of difference passed like dreams away,
We'll meet again, upon some future day.

"When all that hindered, all that vexed our love,
As tall rank weeds will climb the blade above,
When all but it has yielded to decay,
We'll meet again, upon some future day.

"When we have proved, each on his course alone,
The wider world, and learnt what's now unknown,
Have made life clear, and worked out each a way,
We'll meet again,—we shall have much to say

"With happier mood, and feelings born anew,
Our boyhood's bygone fancies we'll review,
Talk o'er old talks, play as we used to play,
And meet again, on many a future day.

"Some day, which oft our hearts shall yearn to see,
In some far year, though distant yet to be,
Shall we indeed,—ye winds and waters, say!—
Meet yet again, upon some future day?"

STERNE AND THACKERAY.[1]

(1864.)

Mr. Percy Fitzgerald has expressed his surprise that no one before him has narrated the life of Sterne in two volumes. We are much more surprised that he has done so. The life of Sterne was of the very simplest sort. He was a Yorkshire clergyman, and lived for the most part a sentimental, questionable, jovial life in the country. He was a queer parson, according to our notions; but in those days there were many queer parsons. Late in life he wrote a book or two, which gave him access to London society; and then he led a still more questionable and unclerical life at the edge of the great world. After that he died in something like distress, and leaving his family in something like misery. A simpler life, as far as facts go, never was known; and simple as it is, the story has been well told by Sir Walter Scott, and has been well commented on by Mr. Thackeray. It should have occurred to Mr. Fitzgerald that a subject may only have been briefly treated because it is a limited and simple subject, which suggests but few remarks, and does not require an elaborate and copious description.

There are but few materials, too, for a long life of Sterne. Mr. Fitzgerald has stuffed his volumes with

[1] *The Life of Laurence Sterne.* By Percy Fitzgerald, M.A., M.R.I.A. In two volumes. Chapman and Hall.

Thackeray the Humourist and the Man of Letters. By Theodore Taylor, Esq. London: John Camden Hotten.

needless facts about Sterne's distant relations, his great-uncles and ninth cousins, in which no one now can take the least interest. Sterne's daughter, who was left ill-off, did indeed publish two little volumes of odd letters, which no clergyman's daughter would certainly have published now. But even these are too small in size and thin in matter to be spun into a copious narrative. We should in this [the *National*] Review have hardly given even a brief sketch of Sterne's life, if we did not think that his artistic character presented one fundamental resemblance and many superficial contrasts to that of a great man whom we have lately lost. We wish to point these out; and a few interspersed remarks on the life of Sterne will enable us to enliven the tedium of criticism with a little interest from human life.

Sterne's father was a shiftless, roving Irish officer in the early part of the last century. He served in Marlborough's wars, and was cast adrift, like many greater people, by the caprice of Queen Anne and the sudden peace of Utrecht. Of him only one anecdote remains. He was, his son tells us, "a little smart man, somewhat rapid and hasty" in his temper; and during some fighting at Gibraltar he got into a squabble with another young officer, a Captain Phillips. The subject, it seems, was a goose; but that is not now material. It ended in a duel, which was fought with swords in a room. Captain Phillips pinned Ensign Sterne to a plaster-wall behind; upon which he quietly asked, or is said to have asked, "*Do* wipe the plaster off your sword before you pull it out of me"; which, if true, showed at least presence of mind. Mr. Fitzgerald, in his famine of matter, discusses who this Captain Phillips was; but into this we shall not follow him.

A smart, humorous, shiftless father of this sort is not perhaps a bad father for a novelist. Sterne was dragged

here and there, through scenes of life where no correct and thriving parent would ever have taken him. Years afterwards, with all their harshness softened and half their pains dissembled, Sterne dashed them upon pages which will live for ever. Of money and respectability Sterne inherited from his father little or none; but he inherited two main elements of his intellectual capital—a great store of odd scenes, and the sensitive Irish nature which appreciates odd scenes.

Sterne was born in the year 1713, the year of the peace of Utrecht, which cast his father adrift upon the world. Of his mother we know nothing. Years after, it was said that he behaved ill to her; at least neglected and left her in misery when he had the means of placing her in comfort. His enemies neatly said that he preferred "whining over a dead ass to relieving a living mother". But these accusations have never been proved. Sterne was not remarkable for active benevolence, and certainly may have neglected an old and uninteresting woman, even though that woman was his mother; he was a bad hand at dull duties, and did not like elderly females; but we must not condemn him on simple probabilities, or upon a neat epigram and loose tradition. "The regiment," says Sterne, "in which my father served being broke, he left Ireland as soon as I was able to be carried, and came to the family seat at Elvington, near York, where his mother lived." After this he was carried about for some years, as his father led the rambling life of a poor ensign, who was one of very many engaged during a very great war, and discarded at a hasty peace. Then, perhaps luckily, his father died, and "my cousin Sterne of Elvington," as he calls him, took charge of him, and sent him to school and college. At neither of these was he very eminent. He told one story late in life which may be true, but seems very unlike the usual school-life,

"My schoolmaster," he says, "had the ceiling of the schoolroom new whitewashed: the ladder remained there. I one unlucky day mounted it, and wrote with a brush in large capitals LAU. STERNE, for which the usher severely punished me. My master was much hurt at this, and said before me that never should that name be effaced, for I was a boy of genius, and he was sure I should come to preferment." But "genius" is rarely popular in places of education; and it is, to say the least, remarkable that so sentimental a man as Sterne should have chanced upon so sentimental an instructor. It is wise to be suspicious of aged reminiscents; they are like persons entrusted with "untold gold"; there is no check on what they tell us.

Sterne went to Cambridge, and though he did not acquire elaborate learning, he thoroughly learned a gentlemanly stock of elementary knowledge. There is even something scholarlike about his style. It bears the indefinable traces which an exact study of words will always leave upon the use of words. He was accused of stealing learning, and it is likely enough that a great many needless quotations which were stuck into *Tristram Shandy* were abstracted from second-hand storehouses where such things are to be found. But what he stole was worth very little, and his theft may now at least be pardoned, for it injures the popularity of his works. Our present novel-readers do not at all care for an elaborate caricature of the scholastic learning; it is so obsolete that we do not care to have it mimicked. Much of *Tristram Shandy* is a sort of antediluvian fun, in which uncouth Saurian jokes play idly in an unintelligible world.

When he left college, Sterne had a piece of good fortune which in fact ruined him. He had an uncle with much influence in the Church, and he was thereby induced to enter the Church. There could not have been a greater

error. He had no special vice; he was notorious for no wild dissipation or unpardonable folly; he had done nothing which even in this more discreet age would be considered imprudent. He had even a refinement which must have saved him from gross vice, and a nicety of nature which must have saved him from coarse associations. But for all that he was as little fit for a Christian priest as if he had been a drunkard and a profligate. Perhaps he was less fit.

There are certain persons whom taste guides, much as morality and conscience guide ordinary persons. They are "gentlemen". They revolt from what is coarse; are sickened by that which is gross; hate what is ugly. They have no temptation to what we may call ordinary vices; they have no inclination for such raw food; on the contrary, they are repelled by it and loathe it. The law in their members does *not* war against the law of their mind; on the contrary, the *taste* of their bodily nature is mainly in harmony with what conscience would prescribe or religion direct. They may not have heard the saying that the "beautiful is higher than the good, for it includes the good". But when they do hear it, it comes upon them as a revelation of their instinctive creed, of the guidance under which they have been living all their lives. They are pure because it is ugly to be impure; innocent because it is out of taste to be otherwise; they live within the hedgerows of polished society; they do not wish to go beyond them into the great deep of human life; they have a horror of that "impious ocean," yet not of the impiety, but of the miscellaneous noise, the disordered confusion of the whole. These are the men whom it is hardest to make Christian—for the simplest reason; paganism is sufficient for them. Their pride of the eye is a good pride; their love of the flesh is a delicate and directing love. They keep "within the pathways" because they dislike the gross, the uncultured and the untrodden.

Thus they reject the primitive precept which comes before Christianity. Repent! repent! says a voice in the wilderness; but the delicate pagan feels superior to the voice in the wilderness. Why should he attend to this uncouth person? He has nice clothes and well-chosen food, the treasures of exact knowledge, the delicate results of the highest civilisation. Is he to be directed by a person of savage habits, with a distorted countenance, who lives on wild honey, who does not wear decent clothes? To the pure worshipper of beauty, to the naturally refined pagan, conscience and the religion of conscience are not merely intruders, but barbarous intruders. At least so it is in youth, when life is simple and temptations, if strong, are distinct. Years afterwards, probably, the purest pagan will be taught by a constant accession of indistinct temptations, and by a gradual declension of his nature, that taste at the best, and sentiment of the very purest, are insufficient guides in the perplexing labyrinth of the world.

Sterne was a pagan. He went into the Church; but Mr. Thackeray, no bad judge, said most justly that his sermons "have not a single Christian sentiment". They are well-expressed, vigorous, moral essays; but they are no more. Much more was not expected by many congregations in the last age. The secular feeling of the English people, though always strong,—though strong in Chaucer's time, and though strong now,—was never so all-powerful as in the last century. It was in those days that the poet Crabbe was remonstrated with for introducing heaven and hell into his sermons; such extravagances, he was told, were very well for the Methodists, but a *clergyman* should confine himself to sober matters of this world, and show the prudence and the reasonableness of virtue during this life. There is not much of heaven and hell in Sterne's sermons, and what there is seems a rhetorical emphasis which is not

essential to the argument, and which might perhaps as well be left out. Auguste Comte might have admitted most of these sermons; they are healthy statements of earthly truths, but they would be just as true if there was no religion at all. Religion helps the argument, because foolish people might be perplexed with this world, and they yield readily to another; religion enables you—such is the real doctrine of these divines, when you examine it—to coax and persuade those whom you cannot rationally convince; but it does not alter the matter in hand—it does not affect that of which you wish to persuade men, for you are but inculcating a course of conduct *in this life*. Sterne's sermons would be just as true if the secularists should succeed in their argument, and the "valuable illusion" of a deity were omitted from the belief of mankind.

However, in fact, Sterne took orders, and by the aid of his uncle, who was a Church politician, and who knew the powers that were, he obtained several small livings. Being a pluralist was a trifle in those easy times; nobody then thought that the parishioners of a parson had a right to his daily presence; if some provision were made for the performance of a Sunday service, he had done his duty, and he could spend the surplus income where he liked. He might perhaps be bound to reside, if health permitted, on one of his livings, but the law allowed him to have many, and he could not be compelled to reside on them all. Sterne preached well-written sermons on Sundays, and led an easy pagan life on other days, and no one blamed him.

He fell in love too, and after he was dead his daughter found two or three of his love-letters to her mother, which she rashly published. They have been the unfeeling sport of persons not in love up to the present time. Years ago Mr. Thackeray used to make audiences laugh till they cried by reading one or two of them, and contrasting them with

certain other letters also about his wife, but written many years later. This is the sort of thing:—

"Yes! I will steal from the world, and not a babbling tongue shall tell where I am—Echo shall not so much as whisper my hiding-place—suffer thy imagination to paint it as a little sun-gilt cottage, on the side of a romantic hill—dost thou think I will leave love and friendship behind me? No! they shall be my companions in solitude, for they will sit down and rise up with me in the amiable form of my L.—We will be as merry and as innocent as our first parents in Paradise, before the arch-fiend entered that undescribable scene.

"The kindest affections will have room to shoot and expand in our retirement, and produce such fruit as madness, and envy, and ambition have always killed in the bud.—Let the human tempest and hurricane rage at a distance, the desolation is beyond the horizon of peace. My L. has seen a polyanthus blow in December—some friendly wall has sheltered it from the biting wind. No planetary influence shall reach us, but that which presides and cherishes the sweetest flowers.—God preserve us! how delightful this prospect in idea! We will build and we will plant, in our own way—simplicity shall not be tortured by art—we will learn of nature how to live—she shall be our alchymist, to mingle all the good of life into one salubrious draught.—The gloomy family of care and distrust shall be banished from our dwelling, guarded by thy kind and tutelar deity—we will sing our choral songs of gratitude, and rejoice to the end of our pilgrimage.

"Adieu, my L. Return to one who languishes for thy society.

L. STERNE."

The beautiful language with which young ladies were wooed a century ago is a characteristic of that extinct age; at least, we fear that no such beautiful English will be discovered when our secret repositories are ransacked. The age of ridicule has come in, and the age of good words has gone out.

There is no reason to doubt, however, that Sterne was really in love with Mrs. Sterne. People have doubted it because of these beautiful words; but, in fact, Sterne was just the sort of man to be subject to this kind of feeling. He took—and to this he owes his fame—the *sensitive* view

of life. He regarded it not from the point of view of intellect, or conscience, or religion, but in the plain way in which natural feeling impresses, and will always impress, a natural person. He is a great author; certainly not because of great thoughts, for there is scarcely a sentence in his writings which can be called a thought; nor from sublime conceptions which enlarge the limits of our imagination, for he never leaves the sensuous,—but because of his wonderful sympathy with, and wonderful power of representing, simple human nature. The best passages in Sterne are those which every one knows, like this:—

"Thou hast left this matter short, said my uncle Toby to the corporal, as he was putting him to bed,——and I will tell thee in what, Trim.——In the first place, when thou madest an offer of my services to Le Fevre,—as sickness and travelling are both expensive, and thou knowest he was but a poor lieutenant, with a son to subsist as well as himself, out of his pay,—that thou didst not make an offer to him of my purse; because, had he stood in need, thou knowest, Trim, he had been as welcome to it as myself.——Your honour knows, said the corporal, I had no orders;——True, quoth my uncle Toby,—thou didst very right, Trim, as a soldier, but certainly very wrong as a man.

"In the second place, for which, indeed, thou hast the same excuse, continued my uncle Toby,——when thou offeredst him whatever was in my house,—thou shouldst have offered him my house too:——A sick brother officer should have the best quarters, Trim, and if we had him with us,—we could tend and look to him:——Thou art an excellent nurse thyself, Trim,—and what with thy care of him, and the old woman's, and his boy's, and mine together, we might recruit him again at once, and set him upon his legs.———

"——In a fortnight or three weeks, added my uncle Toby, smiling, —he might march.——He will never march, an' please your honour, in this world, said the corporal:——He will march, said my uncle Toby, rising up from the side of the bed, with one shoe off:——An' please your honour, said the corporal, he will never march, but to his grave:——He shall march, cried my uncle Toby, marching the foot which had a shoe on, though without advancing an inch,—he shall march to his regiment. ——He cannot stand it, said the corporal:——He shall be supported, said my uncle Toby:——He'll drop at last, said the corporal, and what

will become of his boy?——He shall not drop, said my uncle Toby, firmly.——A-well-o'day,—do what we can for him, said Trim, maintaining his point,—the poor soul will die:——He shall not die, by G—! cried my uncle Toby.

"—The ACCUSING SPIRIT, which flew up to heaven's chancery with the oath, blush'd as he gave it in;—and the RECORDING ANGEL, as he wrote it down, dropp'd a tear upon the word, and blotted it out for ever.

"—My uncle Toby went to his bureau,—put his purse into his breeches pocket, and having ordered the corporal to go early in the morning for a physician,—he went to bed, and fell asleep.

"The sun looked bright the morning after, to every eye in the village but Le Fevre's and his afflicted son's; the hand of death pressed heavy upon his eye-lids,——and hardly could the wheel at the cistern turn round its circle,—when my uncle Toby, who had rose up an hour before his wonted time, entered the lieutenant's room, and without preface or apology, sat himself down upon the chair by the bed-side, and independently of all modes and customs, opened the curtain in the manner an old friend and brother officer would have done it, and asked him how he did,—how he had rested in the night,—what was his complaint,—where was his pain,—and what he could do to help him:——and without giving him time to answer any one of the inquiries, went on and told him of the little plan which he had been concerting with the corporal the night before for him.——

"——You shall go home directly, Le Fevre, said my uncle Toby, to my house,—and we'll send for a doctor to see what's the matter,—and we'll have an apothecary,—and the corporal shall be your nurse;——and I'll be your servant, Le Fevre.

"There was a frankness in my uncle Toby,—not the *effect* of familiarity,—but the *cause* of it,—which let you at once into his soul, and showed you the goodness of his nature; to this there was something in his looks, and voice, and manner, super-added, which eternally beckoned to the unfortunate to come and take shelter under him; so that before my uncle Toby had half finished the kind offers he was making to the father, had the son insensibly pressed up close to his knees, and had taken hold of the breast of his coat, and was pulling it towards him.——The blood and spirit of Le Fevre, which were waxing cold and slow within him, and were retreating to their last citadel, the heart,—rallied back,—the film forsook his eyes for a moment,—he looked up wishfully in my uncle Toby's face,—then cast a look upon his boy,—and that *ligament*, fine as it was,—was never broken.——

"Nature instantly ebb'd again,—the film returned to its place,——the pulse fluttered——stopp'd——went on———throbb'd——stopp'd again——moved——stopp'd——shall I go on?——No."[1]

In one of the "Roundabout Papers" Mr. Thackeray introduces a literary man complaining of his "sensibility". "Ah," he replies, "my good friend, your sensibilty is your livelihood: if you did not feel the events and occurrences of life more acutely than others, you could not describe them better; and it is the excellence of your description by which you live." This is precisely true of Sterne. He is a great author because he felt acutely. He is the most pathetic of writers because he had—when writing, at least—the most pity. He was, too, we believe, pretty sharply in love with Mrs. Sterne, because he was sensitive to that sort of feeling likewise.

The difficulty of this sort of character is the difficulty of keeping it. It does not last. There is a certain bloom of sensibility and feeling about it which, in the course of nature, is apt to fade soon, and which, when it has faded, there is nothing to replace. A character with the binding elements—with a firm will, a masculine understanding, and a persistent conscience—may retain, and perhaps improve, the early and original freshness. But a loose-set, though pure character, the moment it is thrown into temptation sacrifices its purity, loses its gloss, and gets, so to speak, out of form entirely.

We do not know with great accuracy what Sterne's temptations were; but there was one, which we can trace with some degree of precision, which has left ineffaceable traces on his works,—which probably left some traces upon his character and conduct. There was in that part of Yorkshire a certain John Hall Stevenson, a country gentleman

[1] *Tristram Shandy*, book vi., chaps. viii.-x.

of some fortune, and possessed of a castle, which he called Crazy Castle. Thence he wrote tales, which he named "Crazy Tales," but which certainly are not entitled to any such innocent name. The license of that age was unquestionably wonderful. A man of good property could write any evil. There was no legal check, or ecclesiastical check, and hardly any check of public opinion. These "Crazy Tales" have license without humour, and vice without amusement. They are the writing of a man with some wit, but only enough wit for light conversation, which becomes overworked and dull when it is reduced to regular composition and made to write long tales. The author, feeling his wit jaded perpetually, becomes immoral, in the vain hope that he will cease to be dull. He has attained his reward; he will be remembered for nauseous tiresomeness by all who have read him.

But though the "Crazy Tales" are now tedious, Crazy Castle was a pleasant place, at least to men like Sterne. He was an idle young parson, with much sensibility, much love of life and variety, and not a bit of grave goodness. The dull duties of a country parson, as we now understand them, would never have been to his taste; and the sinecure idleness then permitted to parsons left him open to every temptation. The frail texture of merely natural purity, the soft fibre of the instinctive pagan, yield to the first casualty. Exactly what sort of life they led at Crazy Castle we do not know; but vaguely we do know, and we may be sure *Mrs.* Sterne was against it.

One part of Crazy Castle has had effects which will last as long as English literature. It had a library richly stored in old folio learning, and also in the amatory reading of other days. Every page of *Tristram Shandy* bears traces of both elements. Sterne, when he wrote it, had filled his head and his mind, not with the literature of his own age, but with

the literature of past ages. He was thinking of Rabelais rather than of Fielding; of forgotten romances rather than of Richardson. He wrote, indeed, of his own times and of men he had seen, because his sensitive vivid nature would only endure to write of present things. But the *mode* in which he wrote was largely coloured by literary habits and literary fashions that had long passed away. The oddity of the book was a kind of advertisement to its genius, and that oddity consisted in the use of old manners upon new things. No analysis or account of *Tristram Shandy* could be given which would suit the present generation; being, indeed, a book without plan or order, it is in every generation unfit for analysis. This age would not endure a statement of the most telling points, as the writer thought them, and no age would like an elaborate plan of a book in which there is no plan, in which the detached remarks and separate scenes were really meant to be the whole. The notion that "a plot was to hang plums upon" was Sterne's notion exactly.

The real excellence of Sterne is single and simple; the defects are numberless and complicated. He excels, perhaps, all other writers in mere simple description of common sensitive human action. He places before you in their simplest form the elemental facts of human life; he does not view them through the intellect, he scarcely views them through the imagination; he does but reflect the unimpaired impression that the facts of life, which do not change from age to age, make on the deep basis of human feeling, which changes as little though years go on. The example we quoted just now is as good as any other, though not better than any other. Our readers should go back to it again, or our praise may seem overcharged. It is the portrait painting of the heart. It is as pure a reflection of mere natural feeling as literatu has ever given, or will ever give. The delineation is nearly perfect. Sterne's feeling in his higher moments so

much overpowered his intellect, and so directed his imagination, that no intrusive thought blemishes, no distorting fancy mars, the perfection of the representation. The disenchanting facts which deface, the low circumstances which debase, the simpler feelings oftener than any other feelings, his art excludes. The feeling which would probably be coarse in the reality is refined in the picture. The unconscious tact of the nice artist heightens and chastens reality, but yet it is reality still. His mind was like a pure lake of delicate water: it reflects the ordinary landscape, the rugged hills, the loose pebbles, the knotted and the distorted firs, perfectly and as they are, yet with a charm and fascination that they have not in themselves. This is the highest attainment of art, to be at the same time nature and something more than nature.

But here the great excellence of Sterne ends as well as begins. In *Tristram Shandy* especially there are several defects which, while we are reading it, tease and disgust so much that we are scarcely willing even to admire as we ought to admire the refined pictures of human emotion. The first of these, and perhaps the worst, is the fantastic disorder of the form. It is an imperative law of the writing art, that a book should go straight on. A great writer should be able to tell a great meaning as coherently as a small writer tells a small meaning. The magnitude of the thought to be conveyed, the delicacy of the emotion to be painted, render the introductory touches of consummate art not of less importance, but of more importance. A great writer should train the mind of the reader for his greatest things; that is, by first strokes and fitting preliminaries he should form and prepare his mind for the due appreciation and the perfect enjoyment of high creations. He should not blunder upon a beauty, nor, after a great imaginative creation, should he at once fall back to bare prose. The high-wrought feeling which a poet

excites should not be turned out at once and without warning into the discomposing world. It is one of the greatest merits of the greatest living writer of fiction—of the authoress of *Adam Bede*—that she never brings you to anything without preparing you for it; she has no loose lumps of beauty; she puts in nothing at random; after her greatest scenes, too, a natural sequence of subordinate realities again tones down the mind to this sublunary world. Her logical style—the most logical, probably, which a woman ever wrote—aids in this matter her natural sense of due proportion. There is not a space of incoherency—not a gap. It is not natural to begin with the point of a story, and she does not begin with it. When some great marvel has been told, we all wish to know what came of it, and she tells us. Her natural way, as it seems to those who do not know its rarity, of telling what happened produces the consummate effect of gradual enchantment and as gradual disenchantment. But Sterne's style is *un*natural. He never begins at the beginning and goes straight through to the end. He shies in a beauty suddenly; and just when you are affected he turns round and grins at it. "Ah," he says, "is it not fine?" And then he makes jokes which at that place and at that time are out of place, or passes away into scholastic or other irrelevant matter, which simply disgusts and disheartens those whom he has just delighted. People excuse all this irregularity of form by saying that it was imitated from Rabelais. But this is nonsense. Rabelais, perhaps, could not in his day venture to tell his meaning straight out; at any rate, he did not tell it. Sterne should not have chosen a model so monstrous. Incoherency is not less a defect because an imperfect foreign writer once made use of it. "You may have, sir, a reason," said Dr. Johnson, "for saying that two and two make five, but they will still make four."[1] Just so, a

[1] Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, chap. xlix.

writer may have a reason for selecting the defect of incoherency, but it is a defect still. Sterne's best things read best out of his books—in Enfield's *Speaker* and other places—and you can say no worse of any one as a continuous artist.

Another most palpable defect—especially palpable now-a-days—in *Tristram Shandy* is its indecency. It is quite true that the customary conventions of writing are much altered during the last century, and much which would formerly have been deemed blameless would now be censured and disliked. The audience has changed; and decency is of course in part dependent on who is within hearing. A divorce case may be talked over across a club-table with a plainness of speech and development of expression which would be indecent in a mixed party, and scandalous before young ladies. Now, a large part of old novels may very fairly be called club-books; they speak out plainly and simply the notorious facts of the world, as men speak of them to men. Much excellent and proper masculine conversation is wholly unfit for repetition to young girls; and just in the same way, books written—as was almost all old literature—for men only, or nearly only, seem coarse enough when contrasted with novels written by young ladies upon the subjects and in the tone of the drawing-room. The change is inevitable; as soon as works of fiction are addressed to boys and girls, they must be fit for boys and girls; they must deal with a life which is real so far as it goes, but which is yet most limited; which deals with the most passionate part of life, and yet omits the errors of the passions; which aims at describing men in their relations to women, and yet omits an all but universal influence which more or less distorts and modifies all these relations.

As we have said, the change cannot be helped. A young ladies' literature must be a limited and truncated literature.

The indiscriminate study of human life is not desirable for them, either in fiction or in reality. But the habitual formation of a scheme of thought and a code of morality upon incomplete materials is a very serious evil. The readers for whose sake the omissions are made cannot fancy what is left out. Many a girl of the present day reads novels, and nothing but novels; she forms her mind by them, as far as she forms it by reading at all; even if she reads a few dull books, she soon forgets all about them, and remembers he novels only; she is more influenced by them than by sermons. They form her idea of the world, they define her taste, and modify her morality; not so much in explicit thought and direct act, as unconsciously and in her floating fancy. How is it possible to convince such a girl, especially if she is clever, that on most points she is all wrong? She has been reading most excellent descriptions of mere society; she comprehends those descriptions perfectly, for her own experience elucidates and confirms them. She has a vivid picture of a *patch* of life. Even if she admits in words that there is something beyond, something of which she has no idea, she will not admit it really and in practice. What she has mastered and realised will incurably and inevitably overpower the unknown something of which she knows nothing, can imagine nothing, and can make nothing. "I am not sure," said an old lady, "but I think it's the novels that make my girls so *heady*." It is the novels. A very intelligent acquaintance with limited life makes them think that the world is far simpler than it is, that men are easy to understand, "that mamma is *so* foolish".

The novels of the last age have certainly not this fault. They do not err on the side of reticence. A girl may learn from them more than it is desirable for her to know. But, as we have explained, they were meant for men and not for girls; and if *Tristram Shandy* had simply given a

plain exposition of necessary facts—necessary, that is, to the development of the writer's view of the world, and to the telling of the story in hand—we should not have complained; we should have regarded it as the natural product of a now extinct society. But there are most unmistakable traces of "Crazy Castle" in *Tristram Shandy*. There is indecency for indecency's sake. It is made a sort of recurring and even permeating joke to mention things which are not generally mentioned. Sterne himself made a sort of defence, or rather denial, of this. He once asked a lady if she had read *Tristram*. "I have not, Mr. Sterne," was the answer; "and, to be plain with you, I am informed it is not proper for female perusal." "My dear good lady," said Sterne, "do not be gulled by such stories; the book is like your young heir there" (pointing to a child of three years old, who was rolling on the carpet in white tunics): "he shows at times a good deal that is usually concealed, but it is all in perfect innocence." But a perusal of *Tristram* would not make good the plea. The unusual publicity of what is ordinarily imperceptible is not the thoughtless accident of amusing play; it is deliberately sought after as a nice joke; it is treated as good in itself.

The indecency of *Tristram Shandy*—at least of the early part, which was written before Sterne had been to France—is especially an offence against taste, because of its ugliness. *Moral* indecency is always disgusting. There certainly is a sort of writing which cannot be called decent, and which describes a society to the core immoral, which nevertheless is no offence against art; it violates a higher code than that of taste, but it does not violate the code of taste. The *Mémoires de Grammont*—hundreds of French memoirs about France—are of this kind, more or less. They describe the refined, witty, elegant immorality of an idle aristocracy. They describe a life "unsuitable to such a

being as man in such a world as the present one," in which there are no high aims, no severe duties, where some precepts of morals seem not so much to be sometimes broken as to be generally suspended and forgotten; such a life, in short, as God has never suffered men to lead on this earth long, which He has always crushed out by calamity and revolution. This life, though an offence in morals, was not an offence in taste. It was an elegant, a *pretty* thing while it lasted. Especially in enhancing description, where the alloy of life may be omitted, where nothing vulgar need be noticed, where everything elegant may be neatly painted,—such a world is elegant enough. Morals and policy must decide how far such delineations are permissible or expedient; but the art of beauty—art-criticism—has no objection to them. They are pretty paintings of pretty objects, and that is all it has to say. They may very easily do harm; if generally read among the young of the middle class, they would be sure to do harm; they would teach not a few to aim at a sort of refinement denied them by circumstances, and to neglect the duties allotted them; it would make shopmen "bad imitations of polished ungodliness," and also bad shopmen. But still, though it would in such places be noxious literature, in itself it would be pretty literature. The critic must praise it, though the moralist must condemn it, and perhaps the politician forbid it.

But *Tristram Shandy's* indecency is the very opposite to this refined sort. It consists in allusions to certain inseparable accompaniments of actual life which are not beautiful, which can never be made interesting, which would, *if* they were decent, be dull and uninteresting. There is, it appears, a certain excitement in putting such matters into a book: there is a minor exhilaration even in petty crime. At first such things look so odd in print that you go on reading

them to see what they look like; but you soon give up. What is disenchanting or even disgusting in reality does not become enchanting or endurable in delineation. You are more angry at it in literature than in life; there is much which is barbarous and animal in reality that we could wish away; we endure it because we cannot help it, because we did not make it and cannot alter it, because it is an inseparable part of this inexplicable world. But why we should put this coarse alloy, this dross of life, into the *optional* world of literature, which we can make as we please, it is impossible to say. The needless introduction of accessory ugliness is always a sin in art, and it is not at all less so when such ugliness is disgusting and improper. *Tristram Shandy* is incurably tainted with a pervading vice; it dwells at length on, it seeks after, it returns to, it gloats over, the most unattractive part of the world.

There is another defect in *Tristram Shandy* which would of itself remove it from the list of first-rate books, even if those which we have mentioned did not do so. It contains eccentric characters only. Some part of this defect may be perhaps explained by one peculiarity of its origin. Sterne was so sensitive to the picturesque parts of life, that he wished to paint the picturesque parts of the people he hated. Country towns in those days abounded in odd characters. They were out of the way of the great opinion of the world, and shaped themselves to little opinions of their own. They regarded the customs which the place had inherited as the customs which were proper for it, and which it would be foolish, if not wicked, to try to change. This gave English country life a motley picturesqueness then, which it wants now, when London ideas shoot out every morning, and carry on the wings of the railroad a uniform creed to each cranny of the kingdom, north and south, east and west. These little public opinions of little places wanted, too, the

crushing power of the great public opinion of our own day; at the worst, a man could escape from them into some different place which had customs and doctrines that suited him better. We now may fly into another "city," but it is all the same Roman empire; the same uniform justice, the one code of heavy laws, presses us down and makes us—the sensible part of us at least—as like other people as we can make ourselves. The public opinion of county towns yielded soon to individual exceptions; it had not the confidence in itself which the opinion of each place now receives from the accordant and simultaneous echo of a hundred places. If a man chose to be queer, he was bullied for a year or two, then it was settled that he was "queer"; that was the fact about him, and must be accepted. In a year or so he became an "institution" of the place, and the local pride would have been grieved if he had amended the oddity which suggested their legends and added a flavour to their life. Of course, if a man was rich and influential, he might soon disregard the mere opinion of the petty locality. Every place has wonderful traditions of old rich men who did exactly as they pleased, because they could set at naught the opinions of the neighbours, by whom they were feared; and who did not, as now, dread the unanimous conscience which does not fear even a squire of £2000 a year, or a banker of £8000, because it is backed by the wealth of London and the magnitude of all the country. There is little oddity in county towns now; they are detached scraps of great places; but in Sterne's time there was much, and he used it unsparingly.

Much of the delineation is of the highest merit. Sterne knew how to describe eccentricity, for he showed its relation to our common human nature: he showed how we were related to it, how in some sort and in some circumstances we might ourselves become it. He reduced the abnormal formation to the normal rules. Except upon this condition,

eccentricity is no fit subject for literary art. Every one must have known characters which, if they were put down in books, barely and as he sees them, would seem monstrous and disproportioned—which would disgust all readers—which every critic would term unnatural. While characters are monstrous, they should be kept out of books; they are ugly unintelligibilities, foreign to the realm of true art. But as soon as they can be explained to us, as soon as they are shown in their union with, in their outgrowth from, common human nature, they are the best subjects for great art—for they are new subjects. They teach us, not the old lesson which our fathers knew, but a new lesson which will please us and make us better than they. Hamlet is an eccentric character, one of the most eccentric in literature; but because, by the art of the poet, we are made to understand that he is a possible, a *vividly* possible man, he enlarges our conceptions of human nature; he takes us out of the bounds of commonplace. He "instructs us by means of delight". Sterne does this too. Mr. Shandy, Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim, Mrs. Shandy—for in strictness she too is eccentric from her abnormal commonplaceness—are beings of which the possibility is brought home to us, which we feel we could under circumstances and by influences become; which, though contorted and twisted, are yet spun out of the same elementary nature, the same thread as we are. Considering how odd these characters are, the success of Sterne is marvellous, and his art in this respect consummate. But yet on a point most nearly allied it is very faulty. Though each individual character is shaded off into human nature, the whole is not shaded off into the world. This society of originals and oddities is left to stand by itself, as if it were a natural and ordinary society,—a society easily conceivable and needing no explanation. Such is not the manner of the great masters; in their best works

a constant atmosphere of half-commonplace personages surrounds and shades off, illustrates and explains, every central group of singular persons.

On the whole, therefore, the judgment of criticism on *Tristram Shandy* is concise and easy. It is immortal because of certain scenes suggested by Sterne's curious experience, detected by his singular sensibility, and heightened by his delineative and discriminative imagination. It is defective because its style is fantastic, its method illogical and provoking; because its indecency is of the worst sort, as far as in such matters an artistic judgment can speak of worst and best; because its world of characters forms an incongruous group of singular persons utterly dissimilar to, and irreconcilable with, the world in which we live. It is a great work of art, but of barbarous art. Its mirth is boisterous. It is *provincial.* It is redolent of an inferior society; of those who think crude animal spirits in themselves delightful; who do not know that, without wit to point them, or humour to convey them, they are disagreeable to others; who like disturbing transitions, blank pages, and tricks of style; who do not know that a simple and logical form of expression is the most effective, if not the easiest—the least laborious to readers, if not always the most easily attained by writers.

The oddity of *Tristram Shandy* was, however, a great aid to its immediate popularity. If an author were to stand on his head now and then in Cheapside, his eccentricity would bring him into contact with the police, but it would advertise his writings; they would sell better: people would like to see what was said by a great author who was so odd as to stand so. Sterne put his eccentricity into his writings, and therefore came into collision with the critics; but he attained the same end. His book sold capitally. As with all popular authors, he went to London; he was *fêted.*

"The *man* Sterne," growled Dr. Johnson, "has dinner engagements for three months." The upper world—ever desirous of novelty, ever tired of itself, ever anxious to be amused—was in hopes of a new wit. It naturally hoped that the author of *Tristram Shandy* would talk well, and it sent for him to talk.

He did talk well, it appears, though not always very correctly, and never very clerically. His appearance was curious, but yet refined. Eager eyes, a wild look, a long lean frame, and what he called a cadaverous bale of goods for a body, made up an odd exterior, which attracted notice, and did not repel liking. He looked like a scarecrow with bright eyes. With a random manner, but not without a nice calculation, he discharged witticisms at London parties. His keen nerves told him which were fit witticisms; *they* took, and *he* was applauded.

He published some sermons too. That tolerant age liked, it is instructive as well as amusing to think, sermons by the author of *Tristram Shandy*. People wonder at the rise of Methodism; but ought they to wonder? If a clergyman publishes his sermons *because* he has written an indecent novel—a novel which is purely pagan—which is outside the ideas of Christianity, whose author can scarcely have been inside of them—if a man so made and so circumstanced is *as such* to publish Christian sermons, surely Christianity is a joke and a dream. Wesley was right in this at least; if Christianity be true, the upper-class life of the last century was based on rotten falsehood. A world which is really secular, but which professes to be Christian, is the worst of worlds.

The only point in which Sterne resembles a clergyman of our own time is, that he lost his voice. That peculiar affection of the chest and throat, which is hardly known among barristers, but which inflicts such suffering upon

parsons, attacked him also. Sterne too, as might be expected, went abroad for it. He "spluttered French," he tells us, with success in Paris; the accuracy of the grammar some phrases in his letters would lead us to doubt; but few, very few Yorkshire parsons could then talk French at all, and there was doubtless a fine tact and sensibility in what he said. A literary phenomenon wishing to enjoy society, and able to amuse society, has ever been welcome in the Parisian world. After Paris, Sterne went to the south of France, and on to Italy, lounging easily in pretty places, and living comfortably, as far as one can see, upon the profits of *Tristram Shandy*. Literary success has seldom changed more suddenly and completely the course of a man's life. For years Sterne resided in a country parsonage, and the sources of his highest excitement were a country town full of provincial oddities, and a "Crazy Castle" full of the license and the whims of a country squire. On a sudden London, Paris, and Italy were opened to him. From a few familiar things he was suddenly transferred to many unfamiliar things. He was equal to them, though the change came so suddenly in middle life—though the change from a secluded English district to the great and interesting scenes was far greater, far fuller of unexpected sights and unforeseen phenomena, than it can be now—when travelling is common—when the newspaper is "abroad"—when every one has in his head some feeble image of Europe and the world. Sterne showed the delicate docility which belongs to a sensitive and experiencing nature. He understood and enjoyed very much of this new and strange life, if not the whole.

The proof of this remains written in the *Sentimental Journey*. There is no better painting of first and ease impressions than that book. After all which has been written on the *ancien régime*, an Englishman at least will

feel a fresh instruction on reading these simple observations. They are instructive *because* of their simplicity. The old world at heart was not like that; there were depths and realities, latent forces and concealed results, which were hidden from Sterne's eye, which it would have been quite out of his way to think of or observe. But the old world *seemed* like that. This was the spectacle of it as it was seen by an observing stranger; and we take it up, not to know what was the truth, but to know what we should have thought to be the truth if we had lived in those times. People say *Eöthen* is not like the real East; very likely it is not, but it is like what an imaginative young Englishman would *think* the East. Just so, the *Sentimental Journey* is not the true France of the old monarchy, but it is exactly what an observant quick-eyed Englishman might fancy that France to be. This has given it popularity; this still makes it a valuable relic of the past. It is not true to the outward nature of real life, but it is true to the reflected image of that life in an imaginative and sensitive man.

Here is the actual description of the old chivalry of France; the "cheap defence of nations,"[1] as Mr. Burke called it a little while afterwards:—

"When states and empires have their periods of declension, and feel in their turns what distress and poverty is—I stop not to tell the causes which gradually brought the house d'E—— in Brittany into decay. The Marquis d'E—— had fought up against his condition with great firmness; wishing to preserve, and still show to the world, some little fragments of what his ancestors had been—their indiscretions had put it out of his power. There was enough left for the little exigencies of *obscurity*. But he had two boys who look'd up to him for *light*—he thought they deserved it. He had tried his sword—it could not open the way—the *mounting* was too expensive—and simple economy was not a match for it—there was no resource but commerce.

[1] *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, paragraph on Marie Antoinette. (Forrest Morgan.)

"In any other province in France, save Brittany, this was smiting the root for ever of the little tree his pride and affection wish'd to see reblossom. But in Brittany, there being a provision for this, he avail'd himself of it; and taking an occasion when the states were assembled at Rennes, the Marquis, attended with his two boys, entered the court; and having pleaded the right of an ancient law of the duchy, which, though seldom claim'd, he said, was no less in force, he took his sword from his side—Here, said he, take it; and be trusty guardians of it, till better times put me in condition to reclaim it.

"The president accepted the Marquis's sword—he stayed a few minutes to see it deposited in the archives of his house—and departed.

"The Marquis and his whole family embarked the next day for Martinico, and in about nineteen or twenty years of successful application to business, with some unlook'd-for bequests from distant branches of his house, return'd home to reclaim his nobility and to support it.

"It was an incident of good fortune which will never happen to any traveller but a sentimental one, that I should be at Rennes at the very time of this solemn requisition: I call it solemn—it was so to me.

"The Marquis enter'd the court with his whole family: he supported his lady—his eldest son supported his sister, and his youngest was at the other extreme of the line next his mother—he put his handkerchief to his face twice—

"—There was a dead silence. When the Marquis had approach'd within six paces of the tribunal, he gave the Marchioness to his youngest son, and advancing three steps before his family—he reclaim'd his sword. His sword was given him; and the moment he got it into his hand he drew it almost out of the scabbard—'twas the shining face of a friend he had once given up—he looked attentively along it, beginning at the hilt, as if to see whether it was the same—when observing a little rust which it had contracted near the point, he brought it near his eye, and bending his head down over it—I think I saw a tear fall upon the place; I could not be deceived by what followed.

"'I shall find,' said he, 'some *other way* to get it off.'

"When the Marquis had said this, he return'd his sword into its scabbard, made a bow to the guardians of it—and with his wife and daughter, and his two sons following him, walk'd out.

"O how I envied him his feelings!"[1]

It shows a touching innocence of the imagination to

[1] *Sentimental Journey*, ii., "The Sword—Rennes".

believe—for probably Sterne did believe—or to expect his readers to believe, in a *noblesse* at once so honourable and so theatrical.

In two points the *Sentimental Journey*, viewed with the critic's eye, and as a mere work of art, is a great improvement upon *Tristram Shandy*. The style is simpler and better; it is far more connected; it does not jump about, or leave a topic *because* it is interesting; it does not worry the reader with fantastic transitions, with childish contrivances and rhetorical intricacies. Highly elaborate the style certainly is, and in a certain sense artificial; it is full of nice touches, which must have come only upon reflection—a careful polish and judicious enhancement, in which the critic sees many a trace of time and toil. But a style delicately adjusted and exquisitely polished belongs to such a subject. Sterne undertook to write, *not* of the coarse business of life —very strong common sort of words are best for that—*not* even of interesting outward realities, which may be best described in a nice and simple style, but of the passing moods of human nature, of the impressions which a sensitive nature receives from the world without; and it is only the nicest art and the most dexterous care which can fit an obtuse language to such fine employment. How language was first invented and made we may not know; but beyond doubt it was shaped and fashioned into its present state by common ordinary men and women using it for common and ordinary purposes. They wanted a carving-knife, not a razor or lancet. And those great artists who have to use language for more exquisite purposes, who employ it to describe changing sentiments and momentary fancies and the fluctuating and indefinite inner world, must use curious nicety, and hidden but effectual artifice, else they cannot duly punctuate their thoughts, and slice the fine edges of their reflections. A hair's-breadth is as important to them

as a yard's-breadth to a common workman. Sterne's style has been criticised as artificial; but it is justly and rightly artificial, because language used in its natural and common mode was not framed to delineate, cannot delineate, the delicate subjects with which he occupies himself.

That contact with the world, and with the French world especially, should teach Sterne to abandon the arbitrary and fantastic structure of *Tristram Shandy* is most natural. French prose may be unreasonable in its meaning, but is ever rational in its structure; it is logic itself. It will not endure that the reader's mind should be jarred by rough transitions, or distracted by irrelevant oddities. *Antics* in style are prohibited by its severe code, just as eccentricities in manner are kept down by the critical tone of a fastidious society. In a barbarous country oddity may be attractive; in the great world it never is, except for a moment; it is on trial to see whether it is really oddity, to see if it does not contain elements which may be useful to, which may be naturalised in, society at large. But inherent eccentricity, oddity *pur et simple*, is *immiscible* in the great ocean of universal thought; it is apart from it, even when it floats in and is contained in it; very, very soon it is cast out from the busy waters, and left alone upon the beach. Sterne had the sense to be taught by the sharp touch of the world; he threw aside the "player's garb" which he had been tempted to assume. He discarded too, as was equally natural, the ugly indecency of *Tristram Shandy*. We will not undertake to defend the morality of certain scenes in the *Sentimental Journey;* there are several which might easily do much harm; but there is nothing displeasing to the natural man in them. They are nice enough; to those whose æsthetic nature has not been laid waste by their moral nature, they are attractive. They have a dangerous prettiness, which may easily incite to practical evil, but in itself, and separated

from its censurable consequences, such prettiness is an artistic perfection. It was natural that the aristocratic world should easily teach Sterne that separation between the laws of beauty and the laws of morality which has been familiar to it during many ages—which makes so much of its essence.

Mrs. Sterne did not prosper all this time. She went abroad and stayed at Montpellier with her husband; but it is not wonderful that a mere "wife," taken out of Yorkshire, should be unfit for the great world. The domestic appendices of men who rise much hardly ever suit the high places at which they arrive. Mrs. Sterne was no exception. She seems to have been sensible, but it was *domestic* sense. It was of the small world, small; it was fit to regulate the Yorkshire parsonage, it was suitable to a small *ménage* even at Montpellier. But there was a deficiency in genera mind. She did not, we apprehend, comprehend or appreciate the new thoughts and feelings which a new and great experience had awakened in her husband's mind. His mind moved, but hers could not; she was anchored, but he was at sea.

To fastidious writers who will only use very dignified words, there is much difficulty in describing Sterne's life in his celebrity. But to humbler persons, who can only describe the things of society in the words of society, the case is simple. Sterne was "an old flirt". These are short and expressive words, and they tell the whole truth. There is no good reason to suspect his morals, but he dawdled about pretty women. He talked at fifty with the admiring tone of twenty; pretended to "freshness" of feeling; though he had become mature, did not put away immature things. That he had any real influence over women is very unlikely; he was a celebrity, and they liked to exhibit him; he was amusing, and they liked him to amuse them. But they

doubtless felt that he too was himself a joke. Women much respect real virtue; they much admire strong and successful immorality; but they neither admire nor respect the timid age which affects the forms of vice without its substance; which preserves the exterior of youth, though the reality is departed; which is insidious but not dangerous, sentimental but not passionate. Of this sort was Sterne, and he had his reward. Women of the world are willing to accept any admiration, but this sort they accept with suppressed and latent sarcasm. They ridiculed his imbecility while they accepted his attentions and enjoyed his society.

Many men have lived this life with but minor penalties, and justly; for though perhaps a feeble and contemptible, it is not a bad or immoral life. But Sterne has suffered a very severe though a delayed and posthumous penalty. He was foolish enough to write letters to some of his friends, and after his death, to get money, his family published them. This is the sort of thing:—

"Eliza will receive my books with this. The sermons came all hot from the heart: I wish that I could give them any title to be offered to yours.—The others came from the head—I am more indifferent about their reception.

"I know not how it comes about, but I am half in love with you—I ought to be wholly so; for I never valued (or saw more good qualities to value) or thought more of one of your sex than of you; so adieu. "Yours faithfully,

"if not affectionately,

"L. Sterne.'

"I cannot rest, Eliza, though I shall call on you at half-past twelve, till I know how you do.—May thy dear face smile, as thou risest, like the sun of this morning. I was much grieved to hear of your alarming indisposition yesterday; and disappointed too, at not being let in. Remember, my dear, that a friend has the same right as a physician. The etiquettes of this town (you'll say) say otherwise.—No matter!

Delicacy and propriety do not always consist in observing their frigid doctrines.

"I am going out to breakfast, but shall be at my lodgings by eleven, when I hope to read a single line under thy own hand, that thou art better, and wilt be glad to see thy Bramin."

This Eliza was a Mrs. Draper, the wife of a judge in India, "much respected in that part of the world". We know little of Eliza, except that there is a stone in Bristol cathedral—

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY
OF
MRS. ELIZABETH DRAPER,
IN WHOM
GENIUS AND BENEVOLENCE
WERE UNITED.
SHE DIED AUGUST 3, 1778, AGED 35.

Let us hope she possessed, in addition to genius and benevolence, the good sense to laugh at Sterne's letters.

In truth, much of the gloss and delicacy of Sterne's pagan instinct had faded away by this time. He still retained his fine sensibility, his exquisite power of entering into and of delineating plain human nature. But the world had produced its inevitable effect on that soft and voluptuous disposition. It is not, as we have said, that he was guilty of grave offences or misdeeds; he made what he would have called a "splutter of vice," but he would seem to have committed very little. Yet, as with most minds which have exempted themselves from rigid principle, there was a diffused texture of general laxity. The fibre had become imperfect; the moral constitution was impaired; the high colour of rottenness had come at last out, and replaced the

delicate bloom and softness of the early fruit. There is no need to write commonplace sermons on an ancient text. The beauty and charm of natural paganism will not endure the stress and destruction of this rough and complicated world. An instinctive purity will preserve men for a brief time, but hardly through a long and varied life of threescore and ten years.

Sterne, however, did not live so long. In 1768 he came to London for the last time, and enjoyed himself much. He dined with literary friends and supped with fast friends. He liked both. But the end was at hand. His chest had long been delicate; he got a bad cold which became a pleurisy, and died in a London lodging—a footman sent by "some gentlemen who were dining," and a hired nurse, being the only persons present. His family were away; and he had devoted himself to intellectual and luxurious enjoyments, which are at least as sure to make a lonely death-bed as a refined and cultivated life. "Self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honoured, self-secure,"[1] a man may perhaps live, but even so by *himself* he will be sure to die. For self-absorbed men the world at large cares little; as soon as they cease to amuse, or to be useful, it flings them aside, and they die alone. Even Sterne's grave, they say, was so obscure and neglected that the corpse-stealers ventured to open it, and his body was dissected without being recognised. The life of literary men is often a kind of sermon in itself; for the pursuit of fame, when it is contrasted with the grave realities of life, seems more absurd and trifling than most pursuits, and to leave less behind it. Mere *amusers* are never respected. It would be harsh to call Sterne a mere amuser, he is much more; but so the contemporary world regarded him. They laughed at his jests, disregarded his death-bed, and neglected his grave.

[1] Matthew Arnold; "Sonnet to Shakespeare".

What, it may be asked, is there in such a career, or such a character as this, to remind us of the great writer whom we have just lost? In externals there seems little resemblance, or rather there seems to be great contrast. On the one side a respected manhood, a long industry, an honoured memory; on the other hand a life lax, if not dissolute, little labour, and a dishonoured grave. Mr. Thackeray, too, has written a most severe criticism on Sterne's character. Can we, then, venture to compare the two? We do so venture; and we allege, and that in spite of many superficial differences, that there was one fundamental and ineradicable resemblance between the two.

Thackeray, like Sterne, looked at everything—at nature, at life, at art—from a *sensitive* aspect. His mind was, to some considerable extent, like a woman's mind. It could comprehend abstractions when they were unrolled and explained before it, but it never naturally created them; never of itself, and without external obligation, devoted itself to them. The visible scene of life—the streets, the servants, the clubs, the gossip, the West End—fastened on his brain. These were to him reality. They burnt in upon his brain; they pained his nerves; their influence reached him through many avenues, which ordinary men do not feel much, or to which they are altogether impervious. He had distinct and rather painful sensations where most men have but confused and blurred ones. Most men have felt the *instructive* headache, during which they are more acutely conscious than usual of all which goes on around them,—during which everything seems to pain them, and in which they understand it, because it pains them, and they cannot get their imagination away from it. Thackeray had a nerve-ache of this sort always. He acutely felt every possible passing fact—every trivial interlude in society. Hazlitt used to say of himself, and used to say truly that,

he could not enjoy the society in a drawing-room for thinking of the opinion which the footman formed of his odd appearance as he went upstairs. Thackeray had too healthy and stable a nature to be thrown so wholly off his balance; but the footman's view of life was never out of his head. The obvious facts which suggest it to the footman poured it in upon him; he could not exempt himself from them. As most men say that the earth *may* go round the sun, but in fact, when we look at the sun, we cannot help believing it goes round the earth,—just so this most impressible, susceptible genius could not help half accepting, half believing the common ordinary sensitive view of life, although he perfectly knew in his inner mind and deeper nature that this apparent and superficial view of life was misleading, inadequate, and deceptive. He could not help seeing everything, and what he saw made so near and keen an impression upon him, that he could not again exclude it from his understanding; it stayed there, and disturbed his thoughts.

If, he often says, "people could write about that of which they are really thinking, how interesting books would be!" More than most writers of fiction, he felt the difficulty of abstracting his thoughts and imagination from near facts which *would* make themselves felt. The sick wife in the next room, the unpaid baker's bill, the lodging-house keeper who doubts your solvency; these, and such as these—the usual accompaniments of an early literary life—are constantly alluded to in his writings. Perhaps he could never take a grand enough view of literature, or accept the truth of "high art," because of his natural tendency to this stern and humble realism. He knew that he was writing a tale which would appear in a green magazine (with others) on the 1st of March, and would be paid for perhaps on the 11th, by which time, probably, "Mr.

Smith" would have to "make up a sum," and would again present his "little account". There are many minds besides his who feel an interest in these realities, though they yawn over "high art" and elaborate judgments.

A painfulness certainly clings like an atmosphere round Mr. Thackeray's writings, in consequence of his inseparable and ever-present realism. We hardly know where it is, yet we are all conscious of it less or more. A free and bold writer, like Sir Walter Scott, throws himself far away into fictitious worlds, and soars there without effort, without pain, and with unceasing enjoyment. You see as it were between the lines of Mr. Thackeray's writings, that his thoughts were never long away from the close proximate scene. His writings might be better if it had been otherwise; but they would have been less peculiar, less individual; they would have wanted their character, their flavour, if he had been able while writing them to forget for many moments the ever-attending, the ever-painful sense of himself.

Hence have arisen most of the censures upon him, both as he seemed to be in society and as he was in his writings. He was certainly uneasy in the common and general world, and it was natural that he should be so. The world poured in upon him, and *inflicted* upon his delicate sensibility a number of petty pains and impressions which others do not feel at all, or which they feel but very indistinctly. As he sat he seemed to read off the passing thoughts—the base, common, ordinary impressions—of every one else. Could such a man be at ease? Could even a quick intellect be asked to set in order with such velocity so many data? Could any temper, however excellent, be asked to bear the contemporaneous influx of innumerable minute annoyances? Men of ordinary nerves who feel a little of the pains of society, who perceive what really passes, who are not

absorbed in the petty pleasures of sociability, could well observe how keen was Thackeray's *sensation* of common events, could easily understand how difficult it must have been for him to keep mind and temper undisturbed by a miscellaneous tide at once so incessant and so forcible.

He could not emancipate himself from such impressions even in a case where most men hardly feel them. Many people have—it is not difficult to have—some vague sensitive perception of what is passing in the minds of the guests, of the ideas of such as sit at meat; but who remembers that there are also nervous apprehensions, also a latent mental life among those who "stand and wait"[1]—among the floating figures which pass and carve? But there was no impression to which Mr. Thackeray was more constantly alive, or which he was more apt in his writings to express. He observes:—

"Between me and those fellow-creatures of mine who are sitting in the room below, how strange and wonderful is the partition! We meet at every hour of the daylight, and are indebted to each other for a hundred offices of duty and comfort of life; and we live together for years, and don't know each other. John's voice to me is quite different from John's voice when it addresses his mates below. If I met Hannah in the street with a bonnet on, I doubt whether I should know her. And all these good people, with whom I may live for years and years, have cares, interests, dear friends and relatives, mayhap schemes, passions, longing hopes, tragedies of their own, from which a carpet and a few planks and beams utterly separate me. When we were at the sea-side, and poor Ellen used to look so pale, and run after the postman's bell, and seize a letter in a great scrawling hand, and read it, and cry in a corner, how should we know that the poor little thing's heart was breaking? She fetched the water, and she smoothed the ribbons, and she laid out the dresses, and brought the early cup of tea in the morning, just as if she had had no cares to keep her awake. Henry (who lived out of the house) was the servant of a friend of mine who lived in chambers. There was a dinner one day, and Henry waited all through the dinner.

[1] Milton, Sonnet xix.

The champagne was properly iced, the dinner was excellently served; every guest was attended to; the dinner disappeared; the dessert was set; the claret was in perfect order, carefully decanted, and more ready. And then Henry said, 'If you please, sir, may I go home?' He had received word that his house was on fire; and, having seen through his dinner, he wished to go and look after his children and little sticks of furniture. Why, such a man's livery is a uniform of honour. The crest on his button is a badge of bravery."[1]

Nothing in itself could be more admirable than this instinctive sympathy with humble persons; not many things are rarer than this nervous apprehension of what humble persons think. Nevertheless it cannot, we think, be effectually denied that it coloured Mr. Thackerary's writings and the more superficial part of his character—that part which was most obvious in common and current society—with very considerable defects. The pervading idea of the "Snob Papers" is too frequent, too recurring, too often insisted on, even in his highest writings; there was a slight shade of similar feeling even in his occasional society, and though it was certainly unworthy of him, it was exceedingly natural that it should be so, with such a mind as his and in a society such as ours.

There are three methods in which a society may be constituted. There is the equal system, which, with more or less of variation, prevails in France and in the United States. The social presumption in these countries always is that every one is on a level with every one else. In America, the porter at the station, the shopman at the counter, the boots at the hotel, when neither a Negro nor an Irishman, is your equal. In France *égalité* is a political first principle. The whole of Louis Napoleon's *régime* depends

[1] *Roundabout Papers*, "On a Chalk-Mark on the Door". (Forrest Morgan.)

upon it; remove that feeling, and the whole fabric of the Empire will pass away. We once heard a great French statesman illustrate this. He was giving a dinner to the clergy of his neighbourhood, and was observing that he had now no longer the power to help or hurt them, when an eager *curé* said, with simple-minded joy: "*Oui, monsieur, maintenant personne ne peut rien, ni le comte, ni le prolétaire*". The democratic priest so rejoiced at the universal levelling which had passed over his nation, that he could not help boasting of it when silence would have been much better manners. We are not now able—we have no room and no inclination—to discuss the advantages of democratic society; but we think in England we may venture to assume that it is neither the best nor the highest form which a society can adopt, and that it is certainly fatal to that development of individual originality and greatness by which the past progress of the human race has been achieved, and from which alone, it would seem, all future progress is to be anticipated. If it be said that people are all alike, that the world is a plain with no natural valleys and no natural hills, the picturesqueness of existence is destroyed, and, what is worse, the instinctive emulation by which the dweller in the valley is stimulated to climb the hill is annihilated and becomes impossible.

On the other hand, there is the opposite system, which prevails in the East—the system of irremovable inequalities, of hedged-in castes, which no one can enter but by birth, and from which no born member can issue forth. This system likewise, in this age and country, needs no attack, for it has no defenders. Every one is ready to admit that it cramps originality, by defining our work irrespective of our qualities and before we were born; that it retards progress, by restraining the wholesome competition between class and class, and the wholesome migration from class to class,

which are the best and strongest instruments of social improvement.

And if both these systems be condemned as undesirable and prejudicial, there is no third system except that which we have—the system of *removable inequalities*, where many people are inferior to and worse off than others, but in which each may *in theory* hope to be on a level with the highest below the throne, and in which each may reasonably, and without sanguine impracticability, hope to gain one step in social elevation, to be at last on a level with those who at first were just above them. But, from the mere description of such a society, it is evident that, taking man as he is, with the faults which we know he has, and the tendencies which he invariably displays, some poison of "snobbishness" is inevitable. Let us define it as the habit of "pretending to be higher in the social scale than you really are". Everybody will admit that such pretension is a fault and a vice, yet every observant man of the world would also admit that, considering what other misdemeanours men commit, this offence is not inconceivably heinous; and that, if people never did anything worse, they might be let off with a far less punitive judgment than in the actual state of human conduct would be just or conceivable. How are we to hope men will pass their lives in putting their best foot foremost, and yet will never boast that their better foot is farther advanced and more perfect than in fact it is? Is boasting to be made a capital crime? Given social ambition as a propensity of human nature; given a state of society like ours, in which there are prizes which every man may seek, degradations which every one may erase, inequalities which every one may remove,—it is idle to suppose that there will not be all sorts of striving to cease to be last and to begin to be first, and it is equally idle to imagine that all such strivings will be of the highest kind. This effort will be,

like all the efforts of our mixed and imperfect human nature, partly good and partly bad, with much that is excellent and beneficial in it, and much also which is debasing and pernicious. The bad striving after unpossessed distinction is snobbishness, which from the mere definition cannot be defended, but which may be excused as a natural frailty in an emulous man who is not distinguished, who hopes to be distinguished, and who perceives that a valuable means of gaining distinction is a judicious though false pretension that it has already been obtained.

Mr. Thackeray, as we think, committed two errors in this matter. He lacerates "snobs" in his books as if they had committed an unpardonable outrage and inexpiable crime. That man, he says, is anxious "to know lords; and he pretends to know more of lords than he really does know. What a villain! what a disgrace to our common nature; what an irreparable reproach to human reason!" Not at all; it is a fault which satirists should laugh at, and which moralists condemn and disapprove, but which yet does not destroy the whole vital excellence of him who possesses it,—which may leave him a good citizen, a pleasant husband, a warm friend; "a fellow," as the undergraduate said, "*up* in his *morals*".

In transient society it is possible, we think, that Mr. Thackeray thought too much of social inequalities. They belonged to that common, plain, perceptible world which filled his mind, and which left him at times, and at casual moments, no room for a purely intellectual and just estimate of men as they really are in themselves, and apart from social perfection or defect. He could gauge a man's reality as well as any observer, and far better than most: his attainments were great, his perception of men instinctive, his knowledge of casual matters enormous; but he had a greater difficulty than other men in relying only upon his

own judgment. "What the footman—what Mr. Yellow-plush Jeames would think and say," could not but occur to his mind, and would modify, not his settled judgment, but his transient and casual opinion of the poet or philosopher. By the constitution of his mind he thought much of social distinctions; and yet he was in his writings too severe on those who, in cruder and baser ways, showed that they also were thinking much.

Those who perceive that this irritable sensibility was the basis of Thackeray's artistic character, that it gave him his materials, his implanted knowledge of things and men, and gave him also that keen and precise style which hit in description the nice edges of all objects,—those who trace these great qualities back to their real source in a somewhat painful organisation, must have been vexed or amused, according to their temperament, at the common criticism which associates him with Fielding. Fielding's essence was the very reverse; it was a bold spirit of bounding happiness. No just observer could talk to Mr. Thackeray, or look at him, without seeing that he had deeply felt many sorrows—perhaps that he was a man *likely* to feel sorrows—that he was of an anxious temperament. Fielding was a reckless enjoyer. He saw the world—wealth and glory, the best dinner and the worst dinner, the gilded *salon* and the low sponging-house—and he saw that they were good. Down every line of his characteristic writings there runs this elemental energy of keen delight. There is no trace of such a thing in Thackeray. A musing fancifulness is far more characteristic of him than a joyful energy.

Sterne had all this sensibility also, but—and this is the cardinal discrepancy—it did not make him irritable. He was not hurried away, like Fielding, by buoyant delight; he stayed and mused on painful scenes. But they did not make him angry. He was not irritated at the "foolish fat

scullion".[1] He did not vex himself because of the vulgar. He did not amass petty details to prove that tenth-rate people were ever striving to be ninth-rate people. He had no tendency to rub the bloom off life. He accepted pretty-looking things, even the French aristocracy, and he owes his immortality to his making them prettier than they are. Thackeray was pained by things, and exaggerated their imperfections; Sterne brooded over things with joy or sorrow, and he idealised their sentiment—their pathetic or joyful characteristics. This is why the old lady said, "Mr. Thackeray was an uncomfortable writer,"—and an uncomfortable writer he is.

Nor had Sterne a trace of Mr. Thackeray's peculiar and characteristic scepticism. He accepted simply the pains and pleasures, the sorrows and the joys of the world; he was not perplexed by them, nor did he seek to explain them, or account for them. There is a tinge—a mitigated, but perceptible tinge—of Swift's philosophy in Thackeray. "Why is all this? Surely this is very strange? Am I right in sympathising with such stupid feelings, such petty sensations? Why are these things? Am I not a fool to care about or think of them? The world is dark, and the great curtain hides from us all." This is not a steady or a habitual feeling, but it is never quite absent for many pages. It was inevitable, perhaps, that in a sceptical and inquisitive age like this, some vestiges of puzzle and perplexity should pass into the writings of our great sentimentalist. He would not have fairly represented the moods of his time if he omitted that pervading one.

We had a little more to say of these great men, but our limits are exhausted, and we must pause. Of Thackeray it is too early to speak at length. A certain distance is needful for a just criticism. The present generation have

[1] *Tristram Shandy*, book iv., chap vii.

learned too much from him to be able to judge him rightly. We do not know the merit of those great pictures which have sunk into our minds, and which have coloured our thoughts, which are become habitual memories. In the books we know best, as in the people we know best, small points, sometimes minor merits, sometimes small faults, have an undue prominence. When the young critics of this year have grey hairs, their children will tell them what is the judgment of posterity upon Mr. Thackeray.

WORDSWORTH, TENNYSON, AND BROWNING; OR, PURE, ORNATE, AND GROTESQUE ART IN ENGLISH POETRY.[1]

(1864.)

We couple these two books together, not because of their likeness, for they are as dissimilar as books can be; nor on account of the eminence of their authors, for in general two great authors are too much for one essay; but because they are the best possible illustration of something we have to say upon poetical art—because they may give to it life and freshness. The accident of contemporaneous publication has here brought together two books very characteristic of modern art, and we want to show how they are characteristic.

Neither English poetry nor English criticism have ever recovered the *eruption* which they both made at the beginning of this century into the fashionable world. The poems of Lord Byron were received with an avidity that resembles our present avidity for sensation novels, and were read by a class which at present reads little but such novels. Old men who remember those days may be heard to say: "We hear nothing of poetry now-a-days; it seems quite down". And "down" it certainly is, if for poetry it be a descent to be no longer the favourite excitement of the more frivolous part of the "upper" world. That stimulating poetry is

[1] *Enoch Arden, etc.* By Alfred Tennyson, D.C.L., Poet Laureate. *Dramatis Personæ.* By Robert Browning.

now little read. A stray schoolboy may still be detected in a wild admiration for the "Giaour" or the "Corsair" (and it is suitable to his age, and he should not be reproached for it), but the *real* posterity—the quiet students of a past literature—never read them or think of them. A line or two linger on the memory; a few telling strokes of occasional and felicitous energy are quoted, but this is all. As wholes, these exaggerated stories were worthless; they taught nothing, and therefore they are forgotten. If now-a-days a dismal poet were, like Byron, to lament the fact of his birth, and to hint that he was too good for the world, the *Saturday Reviewers* would say that "they doubted if he *was* too good; that a sulky poet was a questionable addition to a tolerable world; that he need not have been born, as far as they were concerned". Doubtless, there is much in Byron besides his dismal exaggeration, but it was that exaggeration which made "the sensation" which gave him a wild moment of dangerous fame. As so often happens, the cause of his momentary fashion is the cause also of his lasting oblivion. Moore's former reputation was less excessive, yet it has not been more permanent. The prettiness of a few songs preserves the memory of his name, but as a poet to *read* he is forgotten. There is nothing to read in him; no exquisite thought, no sublime feeling, no consummate description of true character. Almost the sole result of the poetry of that time is the harm which it has done. It degraded for a time the whole character of the art. It said by practice, by a most efficient and successful practice, that it was the aim, the *duty* of poets, to catch the attention of the passing, the fashionable, the busy world. If a poem "fell dead," it was nothing; it was composed to please the "London" of the year, and if that London did not like it, why, it had failed. It fixed upon the minds of a whole generation, it engraved in

popular memory and tradition, a vague conviction that poetry is but one of the many *amusements* for the enjoying classes, for the lighter hours of all classes. The mere notion, the bare idea, that poetry is a deep thing, a teaching thing, the most surely and wisely elevating of human things, is even now to the coarse public mind nearly unknown.

As was the fate of poetry, so inevitably was that of criticism. The science that expounds which poetry is good and which is bad, is dependent for its popular reputation on the popular estimate of poetry itself. The critics of that day had *a* day, which is more than can be said for some since; they professed to tell the fashionable world in what books it would find new pleasure, and therefore they were read by the fashionable world. Byron counted the critic and poet equal. The *Edinburgh Review* penetrated among the young, and into places of female resort where it does not go now. As people ask, "Have you read *Henry Dunbar?* and what do you think of it?" so they then asked, "Have you read the 'Giaour?' and what do you think of it?" Lord Jeffrey, a shrewd judge of the world, employed himself in telling it what to think; not so much what it ought to think, as what at bottom it did think, and so by dexterous sympathy with current society he gained contemporary fame and power. Such fame no critic must hope for now. His articles will not penetrate where the poems themselves do not penetrate. When poetry was noisy, criticism was loud; now poetry is a still small voice, and criticism must be smaller and stiller. As the function of such criticism was limited, so was its subject. For the great and (as time now proves) the *permanent* part of the poetry of his time—for Shelley and for Wordsworth—Lord Jeffrey had but one word. He said,[1] "It won't do". And it will not do to amuse a drawing-room.

[1] The first words in Lord Jeffrey's celebrated review of the "Excursion" were, "This will never do".

The doctrine that poetry is a light amusement for idle hours, a metrical species of sensational novel, did not indeed become popular without gainsayers. Thirty years ago, Mr. Carlyle most rudely contradicted it. But perhaps this is about all that he has done. He has denied, but he has not disproved. He has contradicted the floating paganism, but he has not founded the deep religion. All about and around us a *faith* in poetry struggles to be extricated, but it is not extricated. Some day, at the touch of the true word, the whole confusion will by magic cease; the broken and shapeless notions will cohere and crystallise into a bright and true theory. But this cannot be yet.

But though no complete theory of the poetic art as yet be possible for us, though perhaps only our children's children will be able to speak on this subject with the assured confidence which belongs to accepted truth, yet something of some certainty may be stated on the easier elements, and something that will throw light on these two new books. But it will be necessary to assign reasons, and the assigning of reasons is a dry task. Years ago, when criticism only tried to show how poetry could be made a good amusement, it was not impossible that criticism itself should be amusing. But now it must at least be serious, for we believe that poetry is a serious and a deep thing.

There should be a word in the language of literary art to express what the word "picturesque" expresses for the fine arts. *Picturesque* means fit to be put into a picture; we want a word *literatesque*, "fit to be put into a book". An artist goes through a hundred different country scenes, rich with beauties, charms and merits, but he does not paint any of them. He leaves them alone; he idles on till he finds the hundred-and-first—a scene which many observers would not think much of, but which *he* knows by virtue of his art will look well on canvas, and this he paints

and preserves. Susceptible observers, though not artists, feel this quality too; they say of a scene, "How picturesque!" meaning by this a quality distinct from that of beauty, or sublimity, or grandeur—meaning to speak not only of the scene as it is in itself, but also of its fitness for imitation by art; meaning not only that it is good, but that its goodness is such as ought to be transferred to paper; meaning not simply that it fascinates, but also that its fascination is such as ought to be copied by man. A fine and insensible instinct has put language to this subtle use; it expresses an idea without which fine-art criticism could not go on, and it is very natural that the language of pictorial art should be better supplied with words than that of literary criticism, for the eye was used before the mind, and language embodies primitive sensuous ideas, long ere it expresses, or need express, abstract and literary ones.

The reason why a landscape is "picturesque" is often said to be, that such landscape represents an "idea". But this explanation, though, in the minds of some who use it, it is near akin to the truth, fails to explain that truth to those who did not know it before; the word "idea" is so often used in these subjects when people do not know anything else to say; it represents so often a kind of intellectual insolvency, when philosophers are at their wits' end, that shrewd people will never readily on any occasion give it credit for meaning anything. A wise explainer must, therefore, look out for other words to convey what he has to say. *Landscapes*, like everything else in nature, divide themselves as we look at them into a sort of rude classification. We go down a river, for example, and we see a hundred landscapes on both sides of it, resembling one another in much, yet differing in something; with trees here, and a farmhouse there, and shadows on one side, and a deep pool far on, a collection of circumstances most familiar in them-

selves, but making a perpetual novelty by the magic of their various combinations. We travel so for miles and hours, and then we come to a scene which also has these various circumstances and adjuncts, but which combines them best, which makes the best whole of them, which shows them in their best proportion at a single glance before the eye. Then we say: "This is the place to paint the river; this is the picturesque point!" Or, if not artists or critics of art, we feel without analysis or examination that somehow this bend or sweep of the river shall in future *be the river to us:* that it is the image of it which we will retain in our mind's eye, by which we will remember it, which we will call up when we want to describe or think of it. Some fine countries, some beautiful rivers, have not this picturesque quality: they give us elements of beauty, but they do not combine them together; we go on for a time delighted, but *after* a time somehow we get wearied; we feel that we are taking in nothing and learning nothing; we get no collected image before our mind; we see the accidents and circumstances of that sort of scenery, but the summary scene we do not see; we find *disjecta membra*, but no form; various and many and faulty approximations are displayed in succession; but the absolute perfection in that country's or river's scenery—its *type*—is withheld. We go away from such places in part delighted, but in part baffled; we have been puzzled by pretty things; we have beheld a hundred different inconsistent specimens of the same sort of beauty; but the rememberable idea, the full development, the characteristic individuality of it, we have not seen.

We find the same sort of quality in all parts of painting. We see a portrait of a person we know, and we say, "It is like—yes, like, of course, but it is not *the man*"; we feel it could not be any one else, but still, somehow it fails to bring home to us the individual as we know him to be.

He is not there. An accumulation of features like his are painted, but his essence is not painted; an approximation more or less excellent is given, but the characteristic expression, the *typical* form, of the man is withheld.

Literature—the painting of words—has the same quality, but wants the analogous word. The word "*literatesque*" would mean, if we possessed it, that perfect combination in *subject-matter* of literature, which suits the *art* of literature. We often meet people, and say of them, sometimes meaning well and sometimes ill: "How well so-and-so would do in a book!" Such people are by no means the best people; but they are the most effective people—the most rememberable people. Frequently, when we first know them, we like them because they explain to us so much of our experience; we have known many people "like that," in one way or another, but we did not seem to understand them; they were nothing to us, for their traits were indistinct; we forgot them, for they hitched on to nothing, and we could not classify them. But when we see the *type* of the genus, at once we seem to comprehend its character; the inferior specimens are explained by the perfect embodiment; the approximations are definable when we know the ideal to which they draw near. There are an infinite number of classes of human beings, but in each of these classes there is a distinctive type which, if we could expand it in words, would define the class. We cannot expand it in formal terms any more than a landscape, or a species of landscape; but we have an art, an art of words, which can draw it. Travellers and others often bring home, in addition to their long journals—which, though so living to them, are so dead, so inanimate, so undescriptive to all else—a pen-and-ink sketch, rudely done very likely, but which, perhaps, even the more for the blots and strokes, gives a distinct notion, an emphatic image, to all who see it. We

say at once, *now* we know the sort of thing. The sketch has *hit* the mind. True literature does the same. It describes sorts, varieties, and permutations, by delineating the type of each sort, the ideal of each variety, the central, the marking trait of each permutation.

On this account, the greatest artists of the world have ever shown an enthusiasm for reality. To care for notions and abstractions; to philosophise; to reason out conclusions; to care for schemes of thought, are signs in the artistic mind of secondary excellence. A Schiller, a Euripides, a Ben Jonson, cares for *ideas*—for the parings of the intellect, and the distillation of the mind; a Shakespeare, a Homer, a Goethe, finds his mental occupation, the true home of his natural thoughts, in the real world—"which is the world of all of us"[1]—where the face of Nature, the moving masses of men and women, are ever changing, ever multiplying, ever mixing one with the other. The reason is plain—the business of the poet, of the artist, is with *types;* and those types are mirrored in reality. As a painter must not only have a hand to execute, but an eye to distinguish—as he must go here and there through the real world to catch the picturesque man, the picturesque scene, which is to live on his canvas—so the poet must find in that reality, the *literatesque* man, the *literatesque* scene, which nature intends for him, and which will live in his page. Even in reality he will not find this type complete, or the characteristics perfect; but there he will find, at least, something, some hint, some intimation, some suggestion; whereas, in the stagnant home of his own thoughts he will find nothing pure, nothing as it is, nothing which does not bear his own mark, which is not somehow altered by a mixture with himself.

The first conversation of Goethe and Schiller illustrates

[1] Wordsworth: "Prelude," book xi.

this conception of the poet's art. Goethe was at that time prejudiced against Schiller, we must remember, partly from what he considered the outrages of the "Robbers," partly because of the philosophy of Kant. Schiller's "Essay on Grace and Dignity," he tells us—

"Was yet less of a kind to reconcile me. The philosophy of Kant, which exalts the dignity of mind so highly, while appearing to restrict it, Schiller had joyfully embraced: it unfolded the extraordinary qualities which Nature had implanted in him; and in the lively feeling of freedom and self-direction, he showed himself unthankful to the Great Mother, who surely had not acted like a step-dame towards him. Instead of viewing her as self-subsisting, as producing with a living force, and according to appointed laws, alike the highest and the lowest of her works, he took her up under the aspect of some empirical native qualities of the human mind. Certain harsh passages I could even directly apply to myself: they exhibited my confession of faith in a false light; and I felt that if written without particular attention to me, they were still worse; for, in that case, the vast chasm which lay between us gaped but so much the more distinctly."

After a casual meeting at a Society for Natural History, they walked home, and Goethe proceeds:—

"We reached his house; the talk induced me to go in. I then expounded to him, with as much vivacity as possible, the *Metamorphosis of Plants*,[1] drawing out on paper, with many characteristic strokes, a symbolic plant for him, as I proceeded. He heard and saw all this, with much interest and distinct comprehension; but when I had done, he shook his head and said: 'This is no experiment, this is an idea'. I stopped with some degree of irritation; for the point which separated us was most luminously marked by this expression. The opinions in 'Dignity and Grace' again occurred to me; the old grudge was just awakening; but I smothered it, and merely said: 'I was happy to find that I had got ideas without knowing it, nay, that I saw them before my eyes'.

[1] "A curious physiologico-botanical theory by Goethe, which appears to be entirely unknown in this country: though several eminent continental botanists have noticed it with commendation. It is explained at considerable length in this same *Morphologie*."—Note by Carlyle.

"Schiller had much more prudence and dexterity of management than I; he was also thinking of his periodical the *Horen*, about this time, and of course rather wished to attract than repel me. Accordingly, he answered me like an accomplished Kantite; and as my stiff-necked Realism gave occasion to many contradictions, much battling took place between us, and at last a truce, in which neither party would consent to yield the victory, but each held himself invincible. Positions like the following grieved me to the very soul: *How can there ever be an experiment, that shall correspond with an idea? The specific quality of an idea is, that no experiment can reach it or agree with it.* Yet if he held as an idea, the same thing which I looked upon as an experiment, there must certainly, I thought, be some community between us—some ground whereon both of us might meet!"[1]

With Goethe's natural history, or with Kant's philosophy, we have here no concern; but we can combine the expressions of the two great poets into a nearly complete description of poetry. The "symbolic plant" is the *type* of which we speak, the ideal at which inferior specimens aim, the class characteristic in which they all share, but which none shows forth fully. Goethe was right in searching for this in reality and nature; Schiller was right in saying that it was an "idea," a transcending notion to which approximations could be found in experience, but only approximations—which could not be found there itself. Goethe, as a poet, rightly felt the primary necessity of outward suggestion and experience; Schiller, as a philosopher, rightly felt its imperfection.

But in these delicate matters, it is easy to misapprehend. There is, undoubtedly, a sort of poetry which is produced as it were out of the author's mind. The description of the poet's own moods and feelings is a common sort of poetry—perhaps the commonest sort. But the peculiarity of such cases is, that the poet does not describe himself *as* himself: autobiography is not his object; he takes himself as a

[1] Appendix to Carlyle's *Life of Schiller*, note C.

specimen of human nature; he describes, not himself, but a distillation of himself: he takes such of his moods as are most characteristic, as most typify certain moods of certain men, or certain moods of all men; he chooses preponderant feelings of special sorts of men, or occasional feelings of men of all sorts; but with whatever other difference and diversity, the essence is that such self-describing poets describe what is *in* them, but not *peculiar* to them,—what is generic, not what is special and individual. Gray's "Elegy" describes a mood which Gray felt more than other men, but which most others, perhaps all others, feel too. It is more popular, perhaps, than any English poem, because that sort of feeling is the most diffused of high feelings, and because Gray added to a singular nicety of fancy a habitual proneness to a *contemplative*—a discerning but unbiassed—meditation on death and on life. Other poets cannot hope for such success: a subject so popular, so grave, so wise, and yet so suitable to the writer's nature, is hardly to be found. But the same ideal, the same unautobiographical character is to be found in the writings of meaner men. Take sonnets of Hartley Coleridge, for example:—

I.

"TO A FRIEND.

"When we were idlers with the loitering rills,
The need of human love we little noted:
Our love was Nature; and the peace that floated
On the white mist, and dwelt upon the hills,
To sweet accord subdued our wayward wills:
One soul was ours, one mind, one heart devoted,
That, wisely doating, ask'd not why it doated,
And ours the unknown joy, which knowing kills.
But now I find, how dear thou wert to me;
That man is more than half of Nature's treasure,

Of that fair Beauty which no eye can see,
Of that sweet music which no ear can measure ;
And now the streams may sing for others' pleasure,
The hills sleep on in their eternity."

II.

"TO THE SAME.

"In the great city we are met again,
Where many souls there are that breathe and die,
Scarce knowing more of Nature's potency,
Than what they learn from heat, or cold, or rain,
The sad vicissitude of weary pain ;—
For busy man is lord of ear and eye,
And what hath Nature, but the vast void sky,
And the thronged river toiling to the main?
Oh ! say not so, for she shall have her part
In every smile, in every tear that falls,
And she shall hide her in the secret heart,
Where love persuades, and sterner duty calls :
But worse it were than death, or sorrow's smart,
To live without a friend within these walls."

III.

"TO THE SAME.

"We parted on the mountains, as two streams
From one clear spring pursue their several ways ;
And thy fleet course hath been through many a maze
In foreign lands, where silvery Padus gleams
To that delicious sky, whose glowing beams
Brightened the tresses that old Poets praise ;
Where Petrarch's patient love and artful lays,
And Ariosto's song of many themes,
Moved the soft air. But I, a lazy brook,
As close pent up within my native dell,
Have crept along from nook to shady nook,
Where flow'rets blow, and whispering Naiads dwell.
Yet now we meet, that parted were so wide,
O'er rough and smooth to travel side by side."

The contrast of instructive and enviable locomotion with refining but instructive meditation is not special and peculiar to these two, but general and universal. It was set down by Hartley Coleridge because he was the most meditative and refining of men.

What sort of literatesque types are fit to be described in the sort of literature called poetry, is a matter on which much might be written. Mr. Arnold, some years since, put forth a theory that the art of poetry could only delineate *great actions*. But though, rightly interpreted and understood—using the word action so as to include high and sound activity in contemplation—this definition may suit the highest poetry, it certainly cannot be stretched to include many inferior sorts and even many good sorts. Nobody in their senses would describe Gray's "Elegy" as the delineation of a "great action"; some kinds of mental contemplation may be energetic enough to deserve this name, but Gray would have been frightened at the very word. He loved scholarlike calm and quiet inaction; his very greatness depended on his *not* acting, on his "wise passiveness," on his indulging the grave idleness which so well appreciates so much of human life. But the best answer—the *reductio ad absurdum*—of Mr. Arnold's doctrine, is the mutilation which it has caused him to make of his own writings. It has forbidden him, he tells us, to reprint "Empedocles"—a poem undoubtedly containing defects and even excesses, but containing also these lines:—

> "And yet what days were those, Parmenides!
> When we were young, when we could number friends
> In all the Italian cities like ourselves,
> When with elated hearts we join'd your train,
> Ye Sun-born virgins! on the road of Truth.
> Then we could still enjoy: then neither thought
> Nor outward things were clos'd and dead to us,

But we receiv'd the shock of mighty thoughts
On simple minds with a pure natural joy;
And if the sacred load oppress'd our brain,
We had the power to feel the pressure eas'd,
The brow unbound, the thoughts flow free again,
In the delightful commerce of the world.
We had not lost our balance then, nor grown
Thought's slaves, and dead to every natural joy.
The smallest thing could give us pleasure then—
The sports of the country people;
A flute note from the woods;
Sunset over the sea:
Seed-time and harvest;
The reapers in the corn;
The vinedresser in the vineyard;
The village-girl at her wheel.
Fulness of life and power of feeling, ye
Are for the happy, for the souls at ease,
Who dwell on a firm basis of content.
But he who has outliv'd his prosperous days,
But he, whose youth fell on a different world
From that on which his exil'd age is thrown;
Whose mind was fed on other food, was train'd
By other rules that are in vogue to-day;
Whose habit of thought is fix'd, who will not change,
But in a world he loves not must subsist
In ceaseless opposition, be the guard
Of his own breast, fetter'd to what he guards,
That the world win no mastery over him;
Who has no friend, no fellow left, not one;
Who has no minute's breathing space allow'd
To nurse his dwindling faculty of joy;—
Joy and the outward world must die to him
As they are dead to me."

What freak of criticism can induce a man who has written such poetry as this, to discard it, and say it is not poetry? Mr. Arnold is privileged to speak of his own poems, but no other critic could speak so and not be laughed at.

We are disposed to believe that no very sharp definition can be given—at least in the present state of the critical art—of the boundary line between poetry and other sorts of imaginative delineation. Between the undoubted dominions of the two kinds there is a debatable land; everybody is agreed that the "Œdipus at Colonus" is poetry: every one is agreed that the wonderful appearance of Mrs. Veal[1] is *not* poetry. But the exact line which separates grave novels in verse, like "Aylmer's Field" or "Enoch Arden," from grave novels not in verse, like *Silas Marner* or *Adam Bede*, we own we cannot draw with any confidence. Nor, perhaps, is it very important; whether a narrative is thrown into verse or not certainly depends in part on the taste of the age, and in part on its mechanical helps. Verse is the only mechanical help to the memory in rude times, and there is little writing till a cheap something is found to write upon, and a cheap something to write with. Poetry—verse, at least—is the literature of *all work* in early ages; it is only later ages which write in what *they* think a natural and simple prose. There are other casual influences in the matter too; but they are not material now. We need only say here that poetry, because it has a more marked rhythm than prose, must be more intense in meaning and more concise in style than prose. People expect a "marked rhythm" to imply something worth marking; if it fails to do so they are disappointed. They are displeased at the visible waste of a powerful instrument; they call it "doggerel," and rightly call it, for the metrical expression of full thought and eager feeling—the burst of metre—incident to high imagination, should not be wasted on petty matters which prose does as well—which it does better—which it suits by its very limpness and weakness, whose small changes it follows more easily, and to whose lowest details it can fully and without

[1] De Foe's.

effort degrade itself. Verse, too, should be *more concise*, for long-continued rhythm tends to jade the mind, just as brief rhythm tends to attract the attention. Poetry should be memorable and emphatic, intense, and *soon over*.

The great divisions of poetry, and of all other literary art, arise from the different modes in which these *types*—these characteristic men, these characteristic feelings—may be variously described. There are three principal modes which we shall attempt to describe—the *pure*, which is sometimes, but not very wisely, called the classical; the *ornate*, which is also unwisely called romantic; and the *grotesque*, which might be called the mediæval. We will describe the nature of these a little. Criticism, we know, must be brief—not, like poetry, because its charm is too intense to be sustained—but, on the contrary, because its interest is too weak to be prolonged; but elementary criticism, if an evil, is a necessary evil; a little while spent among the simple principles of art is the first condition, the absolute pre-requisite, for surely apprehending and wisely judging the complete embodiments and miscellaneous forms of actual literature.

The definition of *pure* literature is, that it describes the type in its simplicity—we mean, with the exact amount of accessory circumstance which is necessary to bring it before the mind in finished perfection, and no more than that amount. The *type* needs some accessories from its nature—a picturesque landscape does not consist wholly of picturesque features. There is a setting of surroundings—as the Americans would say, of fixings—without which the reality is not itself. By a traditional mode of speech, as soon as we see a picture in which a complete effect is produced by detail so rare and so harmonised as to escape us, we say, How "classical"! The whole which is to be seen appears at once and through the detail, but the detail itself is not seen:

we do not think of that which gives us the idea; we are absorbed in the idea itself. Just so in literature, the pure art is that which works with the fewest strokes; the fewest, that is, for its purpose, for its aim is to call up and bring home to men an idea, a form, a character, and if that idea be twisted, that form be involved, that character perplexed, many strokes of literary art will be needful. Pure art does not mutilate its object; it represents it as fully as is possible with the slightest effort which is possible: it shrinks from no needful circumstances, as little as it inserts any which are needless. The precise peculiarity is not merely that no incidental circumstance is inserted which does not tell on the main design—no art is fit to be called *art* which permits a stroke to be put in without an object—but that only the minimum of such circumstance is inserted at all. The form is sometimes said to be bare, the accessories are sometimes said to be invisible, because the appendages are so choice that the shape only is perceived.

The English literature undoubtedly contains much impure literature—impure in its style, if not in its meaning—but it also contains one great, one nearly perfect, model of the pure style in the literary expression of typical *sentiment;* and one not perfect, but gigantic and close approximation to perfection in the pure delineation of objective character. Wordsworth, perhaps, comes as near to choice purity of style in sentiment as is possible; Milton, with exceptions and conditions to be explained, approaches perfection by the strenuous purity with which he depicts character.

A wit once said, that "*pretty* women had more features than *beautiful* women," and though the expression may be criticised, the meaning is correct. Pretty women seem to have a great number of attractive points, each of which attracts your attention, and each one of which you remember afterwards; yet these points have not grown together,

their features have not linked themselves into a single inseparable whole. But a beautiful woman is a whole as she is; you no more take her to pieces than a Greek statue; she is not an aggregate of divisible charms, she is a charm in herself. Such ever is the dividing test of pure art; if you catch yourself admiring its details, it is defective; you ought to think of it as a single whole which you must remember, which you must admire, which somehow subdues you while you admire it, which is a "possession" to you "for ever".

Of course, no individual poem embodies this ideal perfectly; of course, every human word and phrase has its imperfections, and if we choose an instance to illustrate that ideal, the instance has scarcely a fair chance. By contrasting it with the ideal, we suggest its imperfections; by protruding it as an example, we turn on its defectiveness the microscope of criticism. Yet these two sonnets of Wordsworth may be fitly read in this place, not because they are quite without faults, or because they are the very best examples of their kind of style, but because they are luminous examples; the compactness of the sonnet and the gravity of the sentiment, hedging in the thoughts, restraining the fancy, and helping to maintain a singleness of expression.

"THE TROSSACHS.

"There's not a nook within this solemn pass,
But were an apt confessional for one
Taught by his summer spent, his autumn gone,
That life is but a tale of morning grass
Withered at eve. From scenes of art which chase
That thought away, turn, and with watchful eyes
Feed it 'mid Nature's old felicities,
Rocks, rivers, and smooth lakes more clear than glass
Untouched, unbreathed upon. Thrice happy guest,
If from a golden perch of aspen spray

(October's workmanship to rival May)
The pensive warbler of the ruddy breast
That moral sweeten by a heaven-taught lay
Lulling the year, with all its cares, to rest!"

"COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE, SEPT. 3, 1802.

"Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This city now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! The very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!"

Instances of barer style than this may easily be found, instances of colder style—few better instances of purer style. Not a single expression (the invocation in the concluding couplet of the second sonnet perhaps excepted) can be spared, yet not a single expression rivets the attention. If, indeed, we take out the phrase—

"The city now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning,"

and the description of the brilliant yellow of autumn—

"October's workmanship to rival May,"

they have independent value, but they are not noticed in the sonnet when we read it through; they fall into place there, and being in their place, are not seen. The great subjects of the two sonnets, the religious aspect of beautiful but

grave Nature—the religious aspect of a city about to awaken and be alive, are the only ideas left in our mind. To Wordsworth has been vouchsafed the last grace of the self-denying artist; you think neither of him nor his style, but you cannot help thinking of—you *must* recall—the exact phrase, the *very* sentiment he wished.

Milton's purity is more eager. In the most exciting parts of Wordsworth—and these sonnets are not very exciting—you always feel, you never forget, that what you have before you is the excitement of a recluse. There is nothing of the stir of life; nothing of the brawl of the world. But Milton, though always a scholar by trade, though solitary in old age, was through life intent on great affairs, lived close to great scenes, watched a revolution, and if not an actor in it, was at least secretary to the actors. He was familiar—by daily experience and habitual sympathy—with the earnest debate of arduous questions, on which the life and death of the speakers certainly depended, on which the weal or woe of the country perhaps depended. He knew how profoundly the individual character of the speakers—their inner and real nature—modifies their opinion on such questions; he knew how surely that nature will appear in the expression of them. This great experience, fashioned by a fine imagination, gives to the debate of the Satanic Council in Pandæmonium its reality and its life. It is a debate in the Long Parliament, and though the theme of "Paradise Lost" obliged Milton to side with the monarchical element in the universe, his old habits are often too much for him; and his real sympathy—the impetus and energy of his nature—side with the rebellious element. For the purposes of art this is much better. Of a court, a poet can make but little; of a heaven, he can make very little; but of a courtly heaven, such as Milton conceived, he can make nothing at all. The idea of a court and the

idea of a heaven are so radically different, that a distinct combination of them is always grotesque and often ludicrous. "Paradise Lost," as a whole, is radically tainted by a vicious principle. It professes to justify the ways of God to man, to account for sin and death, and it tells you that the whole originated in a political event; in a court squabble as to a particular act of patronage and the due or undue promotion of an eldest son. Satan may have been wrong, but on Milton's theory he had an arguable case at least. There was something arbitrary in the promotion; there were little symptoms of a job; in "Paradise Lost" it is always clear that the devils are the weaker, but it is never clear that the angels are the better. Milton's sympathy and his imagination slip back to the Puritan rebels whom he loved, and desert the courtly angels whom he could not love, although he praised them. There is no wonder that Milton's hell is better than his heaven, for he hated officials and he loved rebels,—he employs his genius below, and accumulates his pedantry above. On the great debate in Pandæmonium all his genius is concentrated. The question is very practical; it is, "What are we devils to do, now we have lost heaven?" Satan, who presides over and manipulates the assembly; Moloch,

> "The fiercest spirit
> That fought in Heaven, now fiercer by despair,"

who wants to fight again; Belial, "the man of the world," who does not want to fight any more; Mammon, who is for commencing an industrial career; Beelzebub, the official statesman,

> "Deep on his front engraven,
> Deliberation sat and Public care,"

who, at Satan's instance, proposes the invasion of earth,—are as distinct as so many statues. Even Belial, "the man

of the world," the sort of man with whom Milton had least sympathy, is perfectly painted. An inferior artist would have made the actor who "counselled ignoble ease and peaceful sloth," a degraded and ugly creature; but Milton knew better. He knew that low notions require a better garb than high notions. Human nature is not a high thing, but at least it has a high idea of itself; it will not accept mean maxims, unless they are gilded and made beautiful. A prophet in goatskin may cry, "Repent, repent," but it takes "purple and fine linen" to be able to say, "Continue in your sins". The world vanquishes with its speciousness and its show, and the orator who is to persuade men to worldliness must have a share in them. Milton well knew this; after the warlike speech of the fierce Moloch, he introduces a brighter and a more graceful spirit.

> "He ended frowning, and his look denounced
> Desp'rate revenge, and battle dangerous
> To less than Gods. On th' other side up rose
> Belial, in act more graceful and humane:
> A fairer person lost not Heaven; he seem'd
> For dignity composed and high exploit:
> But all was false and hollow, though his tongue
> Dropt manna, and could make the worse appear
> The better reason, to perplex and dash
> Maturest counsels; for his thoughts were low,
> To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds
> Tim'rous and slothful: yet he pleased the ear,
> And with persuasive accent thus began:"

He does not begin like a man with a strong case, but like a man with a weak case; he knows that the pride of human nature is irritated by mean advice, and though he may probably persuade men to take it, he must carefully apologise for giving it. Here, as elsewhere, though the formal address is to devils, the real address is to men:

to the human nature which we know, not to the fictitious diabolic nature we do not know.

> "I should be much for open war, O Peers
> As not behind in hate, if what was urged
> Main reason to persuade immediate war,
> Did not dissuade me most, and seem to cast
> Ominous conjecture on the whole success:
> When he who most excels in fact of arms,
> In what he counsels, and in what excels
> Mistrustful, grounds his courage on despair,
> And utter dissolution, as the scope
> Of all his aim, after some dire revenge.
> First, what revenge? The tow'rs of Heav'n are fill'd
> With armed watch, that render all access
> Impregnable; oft on the bord'ring deep
> Encamp their legions, or with obscure wing
> Scout far and wide into the realm of night,
> Scorning surprise. Or could we break our way
> By force, and at our heels all Hell should rise
> With blackest insurrection, to confound
> Heav'n's purest light, yet our Great Enemy,
> All incorruptible, would on His throne
> Sit unpolluted, and th' ethereal mould
> Incapable of stain would soon expel
> Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire
> Victorious. Thus repulsed, our final hope
> Is flat despair. We must exasperate
> Th' Almighty Victor to spend all His rage,
> And that must end us: that must be our cure,
> To be no more? Sad cure; for who would lose,
> Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
> Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
> To perish rather, swallow'd up and lost
> In the wide womb of uncreated night,
> Devoid of sense and motion? And who knows,
> Let this be good, whether our angry Foe
> Can give it, or will ever? How He can
> Is doubtful; that He never will is sure.
> Will He, so wise, let loose at once His ire

Belike through impotence, or unaware,
To give His enemies their wish, and end
Them in His anger, whom His anger saves
To punish endless? Wherefore cease we then?
Say they who counsel war, we are decreed,
Reserved, and destined, to eternal woe;
Whatever doing, what can we suffer more,
What can we suffer worse? Is this then worst,
Thus sitting, thus consulting, thus in arms?"

. . . . . .

And so on.

Mr. Pitt knew this speech by heart, and Lord Macaulay has called it incomparable; and these judges of the oratorical art have well decided. A mean foreign policy cannot be better defended. Its sensibleness is effectually explained, and its tameness as much as possible disguised.

But we have not here to do with the excellence of Belial's policy, but with the excellence of his speech; and with that speech in a peculiar manner. This speech, taken with the few lines of description with which Milton introduces them, embody, in as short a space as possible, with as much perfection as possible, the delineation of the type of character common at all times, dangerous in many times; sure to come to the surface in moments of difficulty, and never more dangerous than then. As Milton describes it, it is one among several *typical* characters which will ever have their place in great councils, which will ever be heard at important decisions, which are part of the characteristic and inalienable whole of this statesmanlike world. The debate in Pandæmonium is a debate among these typical characters at the greatest conceivable crisis, and with adjuncts of solemnity which no other situation could rival. It is the greatest classical triumph, the highest achievement of the pure style in English literature; it is the greatest description of the

highest and most typical characters with the most choice circumstances and in the fewest words.

It is not unremarkable that we should find in Milton and in "Paradise Lost" the best specimen of pure style. Milton was a schoolmaster in a pedantic age, and there is nothing so unclassical—nothing so impure in style—as pedantry. The out-of-door conversational life of Athens was as opposed to bookish scholasticism as a life can be. The most perfect books have been written not by those who thought much of books, but by those who thought little, by those who were under the restraint of a sensitive talking world, to which books had contributed something, and a various, eager life the rest. Milton is generally unclassical in spirit where he is learned, and naturally, because the purest poets do not overlay their conceptions with book-knowledge, and the classical poets, having in comparison no books, were under little temptation to impair the purity of their style by the accumulation of their research. Over and above this, there is in Milton, and a little in Wordsworth also, one defect which is in the highest degree faulty and unclassical, which mars the effect and impairs the perfection of the pure style. There is a want of spontaneity, and a sense of effort. It has been happily said that Plato's words must have *grown* into their places. No one would say so of Milton or even of Wordsworth. . About both of them there is a taint of duty; a vicious sense of the good man's task. Things seem right where they are, but they seem to be put where they are. Flexibility is essential to the consummate perfection of the pure style, because the sensation of the poet's efforts carries away our thoughts from his achievements. We are admiring his labours when we should be enjoying his words. But this is a defect in those two writers, not a defect in pure art. Of course it *is* more difficult to write in few words than to write in many; to take the best adjuncts, and those only,

for what you have to say, instead of using all which comes to hand: it *is* an additional labour if you write verses in a morning, to spend the rest of the day in *choosing*, that is, in making those verses fewer. But a perfect artist in the pure style is as effortless and as natural as in any style, perhaps is more so. Take the well-known lines:—

> "There was a little lawny islet
> By anemone and violet,
> Like mosaic, paven:
> And its roof was flowers and leaves
> Which the summer's breath enweaves,
> Where nor sun, nor showers, nor breeze,
> Pierce the pines and tallest trees,
> Each a gem engraven:
> Girt by many an azure wave
> With which the clouds and mountains pave
> A lake's blue chasm".[1]

Shelley had many merits and many defects. This is not the place for a complete, or indeed for any, estimate of him. But one excellence is most evident. His words are as flexible as any words; the rhythm of some modulating air seems to move them into their place without a struggle by the poet, and almost without his knowledge. This is the perfection of pure art, to embody typical conceptions in the choicest, the fewest accidents, to embody them so that each of these accidents may produce its full effect, and so to embody them without effort.

The extreme opposite to this pure art is what may be called ornate art. This species of art aims also at giving a delineation of the typical idea in its perfection and its fulness, but it aims at so doing in a manner most different. It wishes to surround the type with the greatest number of circumstances which it will bear. It works not by choice

[1] "The Isle."

and selection, but by accumulation and aggregation. The idea is not, as in the pure style, presented with the least clothing which it will endure, but with the richest and most involved clothing that it will admit.

We are fortunate in not having to hunt out of past literature an illustrative specimen of the ornate style. Mr. Tennyson has just given one admirable in itself, and most characteristic of the defects and the merits of this style. The story of "Enoch Arden," as he has enhanced and presented it, is a rich and splendid composite of imagery and illustration. Yet how simple that story is in itself! A sailor who sells fish, breaks his leg, gets dismal, gives up selling fish, goes to sea, is wrecked on a desert island, stays there some years, on his return finds his wife married to a miller, speaks to a landlady on the subject, and dies. Told in the pure and simple, the unadorned and classical style, this story would not have taken three pages, but Mr. Tennyson has been able to make it the principal—the largest tale in his new volume. He has done so only by giving to every event and incident in the volume an accompanying commentary. He tells a great deal about the torrid zone, which a rough sailor like Enoch Arden certainly would not have perceived; and he gives to the fishing village, to which all the characters belong, a softness and a fascination which such villages scarcely possess in reality.

The description of the tropical island on which the sailor is thrown, is an absolute model of adorned art:—

> "The mountain wooded to the peak, the lawns
> And winding glades high up like ways to Heaven,
> The slender coco's drooping crown of plumes,
> The lightning flash of insect and of bird,
> The lustre of the long convolvuluses
> That coil'd around the stately stems, and ran
> Ev'n to the limit of the land, the glows
> And glories of the broad belt of the world,

All these he saw; but what he fain had seen
He could not see, the kindly human face,
Nor ever hear a kindly voice, but heard
The myriad shriek of wheeling ocean-fowl,
The league-long roller thundering on the reef,
The moving whisper of huge trees that branch'd
And blossom'd in the zenith, or the sweep
Of some precipitous rivulet to the wave,
As down the shore he ranged, or all day long
Sat often in the seaward-gazing gorge,
A shipwreck'd sailor, waiting for a sail:
No sail from day to day, but every day
The sunrise broken into scarlet shafts
Among the palms and ferns and precipices;
The blaze upon the waters to the east;
The blaze upon his island overhead;
The blaze upon the waters to the west;
Then the great stars that globed themselves in Heaven,
The hollower-bellowing ocean, and again
The scarlet shafts of sunrise—but no sail".

No expressive circumstances can be added to this description, no enhancing detail suggested. A much less happy instance is the description of Enoch's life before he sailed:—

"While Enoch was abroad on wrathful seas,
Or often journeying landward; for in truth
Enoch's white horse, and Enoch's ocean spoil
In ocean-smelling osier, and his face,
Rough-redden'd with a thousand winter gales,
Not only to the market-cross were known,
But in the leafy lanes behind the down,
Far as the portal-warding lion-whelp,
And peacock yew-tree of the lonely Hall,
Whose Friday fare was Enoch's ministering".

So much has not often been made of selling fish. The essence of ornate art is in this manner to accumulate round the typical object, everything which can be said about it, every associated thought that can be connected with it, without impairing the essence of the delineation.

The first defect which strikes a student of ornate art—the first which arrests the mere reader of it—is what is called a want of simplicity. Nothing is described as it is; everything has about it an atmosphere of something else. The combined and associated thoughts, though they set off and heighten particular ideas and aspects of the central and typical conception, yet complicate it: a simple thing—"a daisy by the river's brim"—is never left by itself, something else is put with it; something not more connected with it than "lion-whelp" and the "peacock yew-tree" are with the "fresh fish for sale" that Enoch carries past them. Even in the highest cases, ornate art leaves upon a cultured and delicate taste, the conviction that it is not the highest art, that it is somehow excessive and over-rich, that it is not chaste in itself or chastening to the mind that sees it—that it is in an explained manner unsatisfactory, "a thing in which we feel there is some hidden want!"

That want is a want of "definition". We must all know landscapes, river landscapes especially, which are in the highest sense beautiful, which when we first see them give us a delicate pleasure; which in some—and these the best cases—give even a gentle sense of surprise that such things should be so beautiful, and yet when we come to live in them, to spend even a few hours in them, we seem stifled and oppressed. On the other hand there are people to whom the sea-shore is a companion, an exhilaration; and not so much for the brawl of the shore as for the limited vastness, the finite infinite of the ocean as they see it. Such people often come home braced and nerved, and if they spoke out the truth, would have only to say, "We have seen the horizon line"; if they were let alone indeed, they would gaze on it hour after hour, so great to them is the fascination, so full the sustaining calm, which they gain from that union of form and greatness. To a very inferior extent, but still,

perhaps, to an extent which most people understand better, a common arch will have the same effect. A bridge completes a river landscape; if of the old and many-arched sort, it regulates by a long series of defined forms the vague outline of wood and river, which before had nothing to measure it; if of the new scientific sort, it introduces still more strictly a geometrical element; it stiffens the scenery which was before too soft, too delicate, too vegetable. Just such is the effect of pure style in literary art. It calms by conciseness; while the ornate style leaves on the mind a mist of beauty, an excess of fascination, a complication of charm, the pure style leaves behind it the simple, defined, measured idea, as it is, and by itself. That which is chaste chastens; there is a poised energy—a state half thrill, half tranquillity—which pure art gives, which no other can give; a pleasure justified as well as felt; an ennobled satisfaction at what ought to satisfy us, and must ennoble us.

Ornate art is to pure art what a painted statue is to an unpainted. It is impossible to deny that a touch of colour does bring out certain parts; does convey certain expressions; does heighten certain features, but it leaves on the work as a whole, a want, as we say, "of something"; a want of that inseparable chasteness which clings to simple sculpture, an impairing predominance of alluring details which impairs our satisfaction with our own satisfaction; which makes us doubt whether a higher being than ourselves will be satisfied even though we are so. In the very same manner, though the rouge of ornate literature excites our eye, it also impairs our confidence.

Mr. Arnold has justly observed that this self-justifying, self-proving purity of style is commoner in ancient literature than in modern literature, and also that Shakespeare is not a great or an unmixed example of it. No one can say that he is. His works are full of undergrowth, are full of com-

plexity, are not models of style; except by a miracle, nothing in the Elizabethan age could be a model of style; the restraining taste of that age was feebler and more mistaken than that of any other equally great age. Shakespeare's mind so teemed with creation that he required the most just, most forcible, most constant restraint from without. He most needed to be guided among poets, and he was the least and worst guided. As a whole no one can call his works finished models of the pure style, or of any style. But he has many passages of the most pure style, passages which could be easily cited if space served. And we must remember that the task which Shakespeare undertook was the most difficult which any poet has ever attempted, and that it is a task in which after a million efforts every other poet has failed. The Elizabethan drama—as Shakespeare has immortalised it—undertakes to delineate in five acts, under stage restrictions, and in mere dialogue, a whole list of *dramatis personæ*, a set of characters enough for a modern novel, and with the distinctness of a modern novel. Shakespeare is not content to give two or three great characters in solitude and in dignity, like the classical dramatists; he wishes to give a whole party of characters in the play of life, and according to the nature of each. He would "hold the mirror up to nature," not to catch a monarch in a tragic posture, but a whole group of characters engaged in many actions, intent on many purposes, thinking many thoughts. There is life enough, there is action enough, in single plays of Shakespeare to set up an ancient dramatist for a long career. And Shakespeare succeeded. His characters, taken *en masse*, and as a whole, are as well known as any novelist's characters; cultivated men know all about them, as young ladies know all about Mr. Trollope's novels. But no other dramatist has succeeded in such an aim. No one else's characters are staple people in English literature, hereditary

people whom every one knows all about in every generation. The contemporary dramatists, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, etc., had many merits, some of them were great men. But a critic must say of them the worst thing he has to say: "They were men who failed in their characteristic aim"; they attempted to describe numerous sets of complicated characters, and they failed. No one of such characters, or hardly one, lives in common memory; the "Faustus" of Marlowe, a really great idea, is not remembered. They undertook to write what they could not write—five acts full of real characters, and in consequence, the fine individual things they conceived are forgotten by the mixed multitude, and known only to a few of the few. Of the Spanish theatre we cannot speak; but there are no such characters in any French tragedy: the whole aim of that tragedy forbad it. Goethe has added to literature a few great characters; he may be said almost to have added to literature the idea of "intellectual creation,"—the idea of describing the great characters through the intellect; but he has not added to the common stock what Shakespeare added, a new multitude of men and women; and these not in simple attitudes, but amid the most complex parts of life, with all their various natures roused, mixed, and strained. The severest art must have allowed many details, much overflowing circumstance, to a poet who undertook to describe what almost defies description. Pure art would have commanded him to use details lavishly, for only by a multiplicity of such could the required effect have been at all produced. Shakespeare could accomplish it, for his mind was a spring, an inexhaustible fountain, of human nature, and it is no wonder that being compelled by the task of his time to let the fulness of his nature overflow, he sometimes let it overflow too much, and covered with erroneous conceits and superfluous images characters and conceptions which

would have been far more justly, far more effectually, delineated with conciseness and simplicity. But there is an infinity of pure art in Shakespeare, although there is a great deal else also.

It will be said, if ornate art be, as you say, an inferior species of art, why should it ever be used? If pure art be the best sort of art, why should it not always be used?

The reason is this: literary art, as we just now explained, is concerned with literatesque characters in literatesque situations; and the *best* art is concerned with the *most* literatesque characters in the *most* literatesque situations. Such are the subjects of pure art; it embodies with the fewest touches, and under the most select and choice circumstances, the highest conceptions; but it does not follow that only the best subjects are to be treated by art, and then only in the very best way. Human nature could not endure such a critical commandment as that, and it would be an erroneous criticism which gave it. *Any* literatesque character may be described in literature under *any* circumstances which exhibit its literatesqueness.

The essence of pure art consists in its describing what is as it is, and this is very well for what can bear it, but there are many inferior things which will not bear it, and which nevertheless ought to be described in books. A certain kind of literature deals with illusions, and this kind of literature has given a colouring to the name romantic. A man of rare genius, and even of poetical genius, has gone so far as to make these illusions the true subject of poetry—almost the sole subject.

"Without," says Father Newman, of one of his characters,[1] "being himself a poet, he was in the season of poetry, in the sweet spring-time, when the year is most beautiful because it is new. Novelty was beauty to a heart so open and cheerful as his; not only because it was novelty,

[1] Charles Reding in *Loss and Gain*, vol. i., chap. iii.

and had its proper charm as such, but because when we first see things, we see them in a gay confusion, which is a principal element of the poetical. As time goes on, and we number and sort and measure things, —as we gain views, we advance towards philosophy and truth, but we recede from poetry.

"When we ourselves were young, we once on a time walked on a hot summer day from Oxford to Newington—a dull road, as any one who has gone it knows; yet it was new to us; and we protest to you, reader, believe it or not, laugh or not, as you will, to us it seemed on that occasion quite touchingly beautiful; and a soft melancholy came over us, of which the shadows fall even now, when we look back upon that dusty, weary journey. And why? because every object which met us was unknown and full of mystery. A tree or two in the distance seemed the beginning of a great wood, or park, stretching endlessly; a hill implied a vale beyond, with that vale's history; the bye-lanes, with their green hedges, wound on and vanished, yet were not lost to the imagination, Such was our first journey; but when we had gone it several times, the mind refused to act, the scene ceased to enchant, stern reality alone remained; and we thought it one of the most tiresome, odious roads we ever had occasion to traverse."

That is to say, that the function of the poet is to introduce a "gay confusion," a rich medley which does not exist in the actual world —which perhaps could not exist in any world—but which would seem pretty if it did exist. Every one who reads "Enoch Arden" will perceive that this notion of all poetry is exactly applicable to this one poem. Whatever be made of Enoch's "Ocean spoil in ocean-smelling osier," of the "portal-warding lion-whelp, and the peacock yew-tree," every one knows that in himself Enoch could not have been charming. People who sell fish about the country (and that is what he did, though Mr. Tennyson won't speak out, and wraps it up) never are beautiful. As Enoch was and must be coarse, in itself the poem must depend for a charm on a "gay confusion"— on a splendid accumulation of impossible accessories.

Mr. Tennyson knows this better than many of us—he knows the country world; he has proved that no one living

knows it better; he has painted with pure art—with art which describes what is a race perhaps more refined, more delicate, more conscientious, than the sailor—the "Northern Farmer," and we all know what a splendid, what a living thing, he has made of it. He could, if he only would, have given us the ideal sailor in like manner—the ideal of the natural sailor we mean—the characteristic present man as he lives and is. But this he has not chosen. He has endeavoured to describe an exceptional sailor, at an exceptionally refined port, performing a graceful act, an act of relinquishment. And with this task before him, his profound taste taught him that ornate art was a necessary medium—was the sole effectual instrument—for his purpose. It was necessary for him if possible to abstract the mind from reality, to induce us *not* to conceive or think of sailors as they are while we are reading of his sailors, but to think of what a person who did not know, might fancy sailors to be. A casual traveller on the sea-shore, with the sensitive mood and the romantic imagination Dr. Newman has described, might fancy, would fancy, a seafaring village to be like that. Accordingly, Mr. Tennyson has made it his aim to call off the stress of fancy from real life, to occupy it otherwise, to bury it with pretty accessories; to engage it on the "peacock yew-tree," and the "portal-warding lion-whelp". Nothing, too, can be more splendid than the description of the tropics as Mr. Tennyson delineates them, but a sailor would not have felt the tropics in that manner. The beauties of Nature would not have so much occupied him. He would have known little of the scarlet shafts of sunrise and nothing of the long convolvuluses. As in Robinson Crusoe, his own petty contrivances and his small ailments would have been the principal subject to him. "For three years," he might have said, "my back was bad; and then I put two pegs into a piece of drift-wood and so made a chair; and after that it

pleased God to send me a chill." In real life his piety would scarcely have gone beyond that.

It will indeed be said, that though the sailor had no words for, and even no explicit consciousness of, the splendid details of the torrid zone, yet that he had, notwithstanding, a dim latent inexpressible conception of them: though he could not speak of them or describe them, yet they were much to him. And doubtless such is the case. Rude people are impressed by what is beautiful—deeply impressed—though they could not describe what they see, or what they feel. But what is absurd in Mr. Tennyson's description—absurd when we abstract it from the gorgeous additions and ornaments with which Mr. Tennyson distracts us—is, that his hero feels nothing else but these great splendours. We hear nothing of the physical ailments, the rough devices, the low superstitions, which really would have been the *first* things, the favourite and principal occupations of his mind. Just so when he gets home he *may* have had such fine sentiments, though it is odd, and he *may* have spoken of them to his landlady, though that is odder still,—but it is incredible that his whole mind should be made up of fine sentiments. Besides those sweet feelings, if he had them, there must have been many more obvious, more prosaic, and some perhaps more healthy. Mr. Tennyson has shown a profound judgment in distracting us as he does. He has given us a classic delineation of the "Northern Farmer" with no ornament at all—as bare a thing as can be—because he then wanted to describe a true type of real men: he has given us a sailor crowded all over with ornament and illustration, because he then wanted to describe an unreal type of fancied men,—not sailors as they are, but sailors as they might be wished.

Another prominent element in "Enoch Arden" is yet more suitable to, yet more requires the aid of, ornate art. Mr. Tennyson undertook to deal with *half belief*. The

presentiments which Annie feels are exactly of that sort which everybody has felt, and which every one has half believed—which hardly any one has more than half believed. Almost every one, it has been said, would be angry if any one else reported that he believed in ghosts; yet hardly any one, when thinking by himself, wholly disbelieves them. Just so such presentiments as Mr. Tennyson depicts, impress the inner mind so much that the outer mind—the rational understanding—hardly likes to consider them nicely or to discuss them sceptically. For these dubious themes an ornate or complex style is needful. Classical art speaks out what it has to say plainly and simply. Pure style cannot hesitate; it describes in concisest outline what is, as it is. If a poet really believes in presentiments he can speak out in pure style. One who could have been a poet—one of the few in any age of whom one can say certainly that they could have been and have not been—has spoken thus:—

"When Heaven sends sorrow,
Warnings go first,
Lest it should burst
With stunning might
On souls too bright
To fear the morrow.

"Can science bear us
To the hid springs
Of human things?
Why may not dream,
Or thought's day-gleam,
Startle, yet cheer

"Are such thoughts fetters,
While faith disowns
Dread of earth's tones,
Recks but Heaven's call,
And on the wall,
Reads but Heaven's letters?"[1]

[1] John Henry Newman's "Warnings"

But if a poet is not sure whether presentiments are true or not true; if he wishes to leave his readers in doubt; if he wishes an atmosphere of indistinct illusion and of moving shadow, he must use the romantic style, the style of miscellaneous adjunct, the style "which shirks, not meets" your intellect, the style which, as you are scrutinising, disappears.

Nor is this all, or even the principal lesson, which "Enoch Arden" may suggest to us, of the use of ornate art. That art is the appropriate art for an *unpleasing type*. Many of the characters of real life, if brought distinctly, prominently, and plainly before the mind, as they really are, if shown in their inner nature, their actual essence, are doubtless very unpleasant. They would be horrid to meet and horrid to think of. We fear it must be owned that Enoch Arden is this kind of person. A dirty sailor who did *not* go home to his wife is not an agreeable being: a varnish must be put on him to make him shine. It is true that he acts rightly; that he is very good. But such is human nature that it finds a little tameness in mere morality. Mere virtue belongs to a charity-school girl, and has a taint of the catechism. All of us feel this, though most of us are too timid, too scrupulous, too anxious about the virtue of others to speak out. We are ashamed of our nature in this respect, but it is not the less our nature. And if we look deeper into the matter there are many reasons why we should not be ashamed of it. The soul of man, and, as we necessarily believe, of beings greater than man, has many parts besides its moral part. It has an intellectual part, an artistic part, even a religious part, in which mere morals have no share. In Shakespeare or Goethe, even in Newton or Archimedes, there is much which will not be cut down to the shape of the commandments. They have thoughts, feelings, hopes—immortal thoughts and hopes—which have influenced the

life of men, and the souls of men, ever since their age, but which the "whole duty of man," the ethical compendium, does not recognise. Nothing is more unpleasant than a virtuous person with a mean mind. A highly developed moral nature joined to an undeveloped intellectual nature, an undeveloped artistic nature, and a very limited religious nature, is of necessity repulsive. It represents a bit of human nature—a good bit, of course—but a bit only, in disproportionate, unnatural, and revolting prominence; and therefore, unless an artist use delicate care, we are offended. The dismal act of a squalid man needed many condiments to make it pleasant, and therefore Mr. Tennyson was right to mix them subtly and to use them freely.

A mere act of self-denial can indeed scarcely be pleasant upon paper. A heroic struggle with an external adversary, even though it end in a defeat, may easily be made attractive. Human nature likes to see itself look grand, and it looks grand when it is making a brave struggle with foreign foes. But it does not look grand when it is divided against itself. An excellent person striving with temptation is a very admirable being in reality, but he is not a pleasant being in description. We hope he will win and overcome his temptation; but we feel that he would be a more interesting being, a higher being, if he had not felt that temptation so much. The poet must make the struggle great in order to make the self-denial virtuous, and if the struggle be too great, we are apt to feel some mixture of contempt. The internal metaphysics of a divided nature are but an inferior subject for art, and if they are to be made attractive, much else must be combined with them. If the excellence of "Hamlet" had depended on the ethical qualities of Hamlet, it would not have been the masterpiece of our literature. He acts virtuously of course, and kills the people he ought to kill, but Shakespeare knew that such goodness would not much interest the

pit. He made him a handsome prince and a puzzling meditative character; these secular qualities relieve his moral excellence, and so he becomes "nice". In proportion as an artist has to deal with types essentially imperfect, he must disguise their imperfections; he must accumulate around them as many first-rate accessories as may make his readers forget that they are themselves second-rate. The sudden *millionaires* of the present day hope to disguise their social defects by buying old places, and hiding among aristocratic furniture; just so a great artist who has to deal with characters artistically imperfect, will use an ornate style, will fit them into a scene where there is much else to look at.

For these reasons ornate art is, within the limits, as legitimate as pure art. It does what pure art could not do. The very excellence of pure art confines its employment. Precisely because it gives the best things by themselves and exactly as they are, it fails when it is necessary to describe inferior things among other things, with a list of enhancements and a crowd of accompaniments that in reality do not belong to it. Illusion, half belief, unpleasant types, imperfect types, are as much the proper sphere of ornate art, as an inferior landscape is the proper sphere for the true efficacy of moonlight. A really great landscape needs sunlight and bears sunlight; but moonlight is an equaliser of beauties; it gives a romantic unreality to what will not stand the bare truth. And just so does romantic art.

There is, however, a third kind of art which differs from these on the point in which they most resemble one another. Ornate art and pure art have this in common, that they paint the types of literature in a form as perfect as they can. Ornate art, indeed, uses undue disguises and unreal enhancements; it does not confine itself to the best types; on the contrary, it is its office to make the best of imperfect types and lame approximations; but ornate art, as much as pure

art, catches its subject in the best light it can, takes the most developed aspect of it which it can find, and throws upon it the most congruous colours it can use. But grotesque art does just the contrary. It takes the type, so to say, *in difficulties*. It gives a representation of it in its minimum development, amid the circumstances least favourable to it, just while it is struggling with obstacles, just where it is encumbered with incongruities. It deals, to use the language of science, not with normal types but with abnormal specimens; to use the language of old philosophy, not with what Nature is striving to be, but with what by some lapse she has happened to become.

This art works by contrast. It enables you to see, it makes you see, the perfect type by painting the opposite deviation. It shows you what ought to be by what ought not to be; when complete, it reminds you of the perfect image, by showing you the distorted and imperfect image. Of this art we possess in the present generation one prolific master. Mr. Browning is an artist working by incongruity. Possibly hardly one of his most considerable efforts can be found which is not great because of its odd mixture. He puts together things which no one else would have put together, and produces on our minds a result which no one else would have produced, or tried to produce. His admirers may not like all we may have to say of him. But in our way we too are among his admirers. No one ever read him without seeing not only his great ability but his great *mind*. He not only possesses superficial useable talents, but the strong something, the inner secret something, which uses them and controls them; he is great not in mere accomplishments, but in himself. He has applied a hard strong intellect to real life; he has applied the same intellect to the problems of his age. He has striven to know what *is:* he has endeavoured not to be cheated by counterfeits, not to be

infatuated with illusions. His heart is in what he says. He has battered his brain against his creed till he believes it. He has accomplishments too, the more effective because they are mixed. He is at once a student of mysticism and a citizen of the world. He brings to the club-sofa distinct visions of old creeds, intense images of strange thoughts: he takes to the bookish student tidings of wild Bohemia, and little traces of the *demi-monde*. He puts down what is good for the naughty, and what is naughty for the good. Over women his easier writings exercise that imperious power which belongs to the writings of a great man of the world upon such matters. He knows women, and therefore they wish to know him. If we blame many of Browning's efforts, it is in the interest of art, and not from a wish to hurt or degrade him.

If we wanted to illustrate the nature of grotesque art by an exaggerated instance, we should have selected a poem which the chance of late publication brings us in this new volume. Mr. Browning has undertaken to describe what may be called *mind in difficulties*—mind set to make out the universe under the worst and hardest circumstances. He takes "Caliban," not perhaps exactly Shakespeare's Caliban, but an analogous and worse creature; a strong thinking power, but a nasty creature—a gross animal, uncontrolled and unelevated by any feeling of religion or duty. The delineation of him will show that Mr. Browning does not wish to take undue advantage of his readers by a choice of nice subjects.

"Will sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin;
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,
And feels about his spine small eft-things course,
Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh;
And while above his head a pompion plant,

Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,
Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,
And now a flower drops with a bee inside,
And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch: "

This pleasant creature proceeds to give his idea of the origin of the Universe, and it is as follows. Caliban speaks in the third person, and is of opinion that the maker of the Universe took to making it on account of his personal discomfort :—

"Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!
'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.

"'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,
But not the stars: the stars came otherwise;
Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that:
Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,
And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same.

"'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease:
He hated that He cannot change His cold,
Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish
That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,
And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine
O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,
A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave;
Only she ever sickened, found repulse
At the other kind of water, not her life,
(Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun)
Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe,
And in her old bounds buried her despair,
Hating and loving warmth alike: so He.

"'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,
Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing.
Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech;
Yon auk, one fire-eye, in a ball of foam,
That floats and feeds; a certain badger brown
He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye
By moonlight; and the pie with the long tongue

That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,
And says a plain word when she finds her prize,
But will not eat the ants; the ants themselves
That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks
About their hole—He made all these and more,
Made all we see, and us, in spite: how else?"

It may seem perhaps to most readers that these lines are very difficult, and that they are unpleasant. And so they are. We quote them to illustrate, not the *success* of grotesque art, but the *nature* of grotesque art. It shows the end at which this species of art aims, and if it fails it is from over-boldness in the choice of a subject by the artist, or from the defects of its execution. A thinking faculty more in difficulties — a great type — an inquisitive, searching intellect under more disagreeable conditions, with worse helps, more likely to find falsehood, less likely to find truth, can scarcely be imagined. Nor is the mere description of the thought at all bad: on the contrary, if we closely examine it, it is very clever. Hardly any one could have amassed so many ideas at once nasty and suitable. But scarcely any readers —any casual readers—who are not of the sect of Mr. Browning's admirers will be able to examine it enough to appreciate it. From a defect, partly of subject, and partly of style, many of Mr. Browning's works make a demand upon the reader's zeal and sense of duty to which the nature of most readers is unequal. They have on the turf the convenient expression "staying power": some horses can hold on and others cannot. But hardly any reader not of especial and peculiar nature can hold on through such composition. There is not enough of "staying power" in human nature. One of his greatest admirers once owned to us that he seldom or never began a new poem without looking on in advance, and foreseeing with caution what length of intellectual adventure he was about to commence.

Whoever will work hard at such poems will find much mind in them: they are a sort of quarry of ideas, but whoever goes there will find these ideas in such a jagged, ugly, useless shape that he can hardly bear them.

We are not judging Mr. Browning simply from a hasty, recent production. All poets are liable to misconceptions, and if such a piece as "Caliban upon Setebos" were an isolated error, a venial and particular exception, we should have given it no prominence. We have put it forward because it just elucidates both our subject and the characteristics of Mr. Browning. But many other of his best known pieces do so almost equally; what several of his devotees think his best piece is quite enough illustrative for anything we want. It appears that on Holy Cross day at Rome the Jews were obliged to listen to a Christian sermon in the hope of their conversion, though this is, according to Mr. Browning, what they really said when they came away:—

"Fee, faw, fum! bubble and squeak!
Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week.
Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,
Stinking and savoury, smug and gruff,
Take the church-road, for the bell's due chime
Gives us the summons—'t is sermon-time.

"Boh, here's Barnabas! Job, that's you?
Up stumps Solomon—bustling too?
Shame, man! greedy beyond your years
To handsel the bishop's shaving-shears?
Fair play's a jewel! leave friends in the lurch?
Stand on a line ere you start for the church.

"Higgledy, piggledy, packed we lie,
Rats in a hamper, swine in a stye,
Wasps in a bottle, frogs in a sieve,
Worms in a carcase, fleas in a sleeve.
Hist! square shoulders, settle your thumbs
And buzz for the bishop—here he comes."

And after similar nice remarks for a church, the edified congregation concludes:—

"But now, while the scapegoats leave our flock,
And the rest sit silent and count the clock,
Since forced to muse the appointed time
On these precious facts and truths sublime,—
Let us fitly employ it, under our breath,
In saying Ben Ezra's Song of Death.

"For Rabbi Ben Ezra, the night he died,
Called sons and sons' sons to his side,
And spoke, 'This world has been harsh and strange;
Something is wrong: there needeth a change.
But what, or where? at the last, or first?
In one point only we sinned, at worst.

"'The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet,
And again in his border see Israel set.
When Judah beholds Jerusalem,
The stranger-seed shall be joined to them:
To Jacob's House shall the Gentiles cleave.
So the Prophet saith and his sons believe.

"'Ay, the children of the chosen race
Shall carry and bring them to their place:
In the land of the Lord shall lead the same,
Bondsmen and handmaids. Who shall blame,
When the slave enslave, the oppressed ones o'er
The oppressor triumph for evermore?

"'God spoke, and gave us the word to keep:
Bade never fold the hands nor sleep
'Mid a faithless world,—at watch and ward,
Till Christ at the end relieve our guard.
By His servant Moses the watch was set:
Though near upon cock-crow, we keep it yet.

"'Thou! if Thou wast He, who at mid watch came,
By the starlight, naming a dubious Name!
And if, too heavy with sleep—too rash
With fear—O Thou, if that martyr gash
Fell on Thee coming to take Thine own,
And we gave the Cross, when we owed the Throne—

"'Thou art the Judge. We are bruised thus.
But, the judgment over, join sides with us!
Thine too is the cause! and not more Thine
Than ours, is the work of these dogs and swine,
Whose life laughs through and spits at their creed,
Who maintain Thee in word, and defy Thee in deed!

"'We withstood Christ then? be mindful how
At least we withstand Barabbas now!
Was our outrage sore? But the worst we spared,
To have called those—Christians, had we dared!
Let defiance to them pay mistrust of Thee,
And Rome make amends for Calvary!

"'By the torture, prolonged from age to age,
By the infamy, Israel's heritage,
By the Ghetto's plague, by the garb's disgrace,
By the badge of shame, by the felon's place,
By the branding-tool, the bloody whip,
And the summons to Christian fellowship,—

"'We boast our proof that at least the Jew
Would wrest Christ's name from the Devil's crew.
Thy face took never so deep a shade
But we fought them in it, God our aid!
A trophy to bear, as we march, Thy band
South, East, and on to the Pleasant Land!'"

It is very natural that a poet whose wishes incline, or whose genius conducts, him to a grotesque art, should be attracted towards mediæval subjects. There is no age whose legends are so full of grotesque subjects, and no age whose real life was so fit to suggest them. Then, more than at any other time, good principles have been under great hardships. The vestiges of ancient civilisation, the germs of modern civilisation, the little remains of what had been, the small beginnings of what is, were buried under a cumbrous mass of barbarism and cruelty. Good elements hidden in horrid accompaniments are the special theme of grotesque art, and these mediæval life and legends afford more

copiously than could have been furnished before Christianity gave its new elements of good, or since modern civilisation has removed some few at least of the old elements of destruction. A *buried* life like the spiritual mediæval was Mr. Browning's natural element, and he was right to be attracted by it. His mistake has been, that he has not made it pleasant; that he has forced his art to topics on which no one could charm, or on which he, at any rate, could not; that on these occasions and in these poems he has failed in fascinating men and women of sane taste.

We say "sane" because there is a most formidable and estimable *insane* taste. The will has great though indirect power over the taste, just as it has over the belief. There are some horrid beliefs from which human nature revolts, from which at first it shrinks, to which, at first, no effort can force it. But if we fix the mind upon them they have a power over us just because of their natural offensiveness. They are like the sight of human blood: experienced soldiers tell us that at first men are sickened by the smell and newness of blood almost to death and fainting, but that as soon as they harden their hearts and stiffen their minds, as soon as they *will* bear it, then comes an appetite for slaughter, a tendency to gloat on carnage, to love blood, at least for the moment, with a deep, eager love. It is a principle that if we put down a healthy instinctive aversion, Nature avenges herself by creating an unhealthy insane attraction. For this reason, the most earnest truth-seeking men fall into the worst delusions; they will not let their mind alone; they force it towards some ugly thing, which a crochet of argument, a conceit of intellect recommends, and Nature punishes their disregard of her warning by subjection to the ugly one, by belief in it. Just so the most industrious critics get the most admiration. They think it unjust to rest in their instinctive natural horror: they overcome it, and angry Nature

gives them over to ugly poems and marries them to detestable stanzas.

Mr. Browning possibly, and some of the worst of Mr. Browning's admirers certainly, will say that these grotesque objects exist in real life, and therefore they ought to be, at least may be, described in art. But, though pleasure is not the end of poetry, pleasing is a condition of poetry. An exceptional monstrosity of horrid ugliness cannot be made pleasing, except it be made to suggest—to recall—the perfection, the beauty, from which it is a deviation. Perhaps in extreme cases no art is equal to this; but then such self-imposed problems should not be worked by the artist; these out-of-the-way and detestable subjects should be let alone by him. It is rather characteristic of Mr. Browning to neglect this rule. He is the most of a realist, and the least of an idealist, of any poet we know. He evidently sympathises with some part at least of Bishop Blougram's apology. Anyhow this world exists. "There *is* good wine—there *are* pretty women—there *are* comfortable benefices—there *is* money, and it is pleasant to spend it. Accept the creed of your age and you get these, reject that creed and you lose them. And for what do you lose them? For a fancy creed of your own, which no one else will accept, which hardly any one will call a 'creed,' which most people will consider a sort of unbelief." Again, Mr. Browning evidently loves what we may call the realism, the grotesque realism, of orthodox Christianity. Many parts of it in which great divines have felt keen difficulties are quite pleasant to him. He must *see* his religion, he must have an "object-lesson" in believing. He must have a creed that will *take*, which wins and holds the miscellaneous world, which stout men will heed, which nice women will adore. The spare moments of solitary religion—the "obdurate questionings," the high "instincts," the "first affections," the "shadowy recollections,"

> "Which, do they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain-light of all our day—
> Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;"[1]

the great but vague faith—the unutterable tenets—seem to him worthless, visionary; they are not enough "immersed in matter";[2] they move about "in worlds not realised". We wish he could be tried like the prophet once; he would have found God in the earthquake and the storm; he would have deciphered from them a bracing and a rough religion: he would have known that crude men and ignorant women felt them too, and he would accordingly have trusted them; but he would have distrusted and disregarded the "still small voice": he would have said it was "fancy"—a thing you thought you heard to-day, but were not sure you had heard to-morrow: he would call it a nice illusion, an immaterial prettiness; he would ask triumphantly, "How are you to get the mass of men to heed this little thing?" he would have persevered and insisted, "*My wife* does not hear it".

But although a suspicion of beauty, and a taste for ugly reality, have led Mr. Browning to exaggerate the functions and to caricature the nature of grotesque art, we own, or rather we maintain, that he has given many excellent specimens of that art within its proper boundaries and limits. Take an example, his picture of what we may call the *bourgeois* nature in *difficulties;* in the utmost difficulty, in contact with magic and the supernatural. He has made of it something homely, comic, true; reminding us of what *bourgeois* nature really is. By showing us the type under abnormal conditions, he reminds us of the type under its best and most satisfactory conditions:—

[1] Wordsworth: "Intimations of Immortality," ix.

[2] *Locke on the Human Understanding*, book iv., chap. iii., 1, 2,

"Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its walls on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

"Rats!
They fought the dogs, and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cook's own ladles
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats,
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

"At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
'Tis clear,' cried they, 'our Mayor's a noddy,
And as for our Corporation—shocking,
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine,
For dolts that can't or won't determine
What's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you're old and obese,
To find in the furry civic robe ease?
Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
To find the remedy we're lacking,
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!'
And at this the Mayor and the Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation."

A person of musical abilities proposes to extricate the civic dignitaries from the difficulty, and they promise him a thousand guilders if he does.

"Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eye twinkled,
Like a candle-flame when salt is sprinkled;
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling:
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers.
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens.
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—
Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing
Until they came to the river Weser,
Wherein all plunged and perished!
—Save one who, stout as Julius Cæsar,
Swam across and lived to carry
(As he, the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary:
Which was, 'At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
Into a cider-press's gripe:
And a moving away of pickle-tub boards,
And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
And a drawing the corks of train-oil flasks,
And a breaking the hoops of butter casks;
And it seemed as if a voice
(Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
Is breathed) called out, Oh rats, rejoice!
The world is grown to one vast drysaltery

So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!
And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
All ready staved, like a great sun shone
Glorious scarce an inch before me,
Just as methought it said, Come bore me!
—I found the Weser rolling o'er me.'
You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
'Go,' said the Mayor, 'and get long poles,
Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
Consult with carpenters and builders,
And leave in our town not even a trace
Of the rats!' when suddenly up the face
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a 'First, if you please, my thousand guilders!'

"A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue;
So did the Corporation too.
For council dinners made rare havoc
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;
And half the money would replenish
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.
To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
With a gipsy coat of red and yellow!
'Beside,' quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
'Our business was done at the river's brink;
We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
From the duty of giving you something for drink,
And a matter of money to put in your poke;
But as for the guilders, what we spoke
Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.
Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.
A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!'

"The Piper's face fell, and he cried,
'No trifling! I can't wait, beside!
I've promised to visit by dinner-time
Bagdat, and accept the prime

Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,
For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
Of a nest of scorpions no survivor—
With him I proved no bargain-driver.
With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver!
And folks who put me in a passion
May find me pipe to another fashion.'

"'How?' cried the Mayor, 'd'ye think I'll brook
Being worse treated than a Cook?
Insulted by a lazy ribald
With idle pipe and vesture piebald?
You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,
Blow your pipe there till you burst!'

"Once more he stept into the street;
And to his lips again
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering,
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,
Out came the children running.

"All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

. . . .

"And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania there's a tribe
Of alien people that ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbours lay such stress
To their fathers and mothers having risen

> Out of some subterraneous prison
> Into which they were trepanned
> Long time ago in a mighty band
> Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
> But how or why they don't understand."

Something more we had to say of Mr. Browning, but we must stop. It is singularly characteristic of this age that the poems which rise to the surface should be examples of ornate art, and grotesque art, not of pure art. We live in the realm of the *half* educated. The number of readers grows daily, but the quality of readers does not improve rapidly. The middle class is scattered, heedless; it is well-meaning, but aimless; wishing to be wise, but ignorant how to be wise. The aristocracy of England never was a literary aristocracy, never even in the days of its full power, of its unquestioned predominance, did it guide — did it even seriously try to guide—the taste of England. Without guidance young men, and tired men, are thrown amongst a mass of books; they have to choose which they like; many of them would much like to improve their culture, to chasten their taste, if they knew how. But left to themselves they take, not pure art, but showy art; not that which permanently relieves the eye and makes it happy whenever it looks, and as long as it looks, but *glaring* art which catches and arrests the eye for a moment, but which in the end fatigues it. But before the wholesome remedy of nature—the fatigue arrives—the hasty reader has passed on to some new excitement, which in its turn stimulates for an instant, and then is passed by for ever. These conditions are not favourable to the due appreciation of pure art—of that art which must be known before it is admired—which must have fastened irrevocably on the brain before you appreciate it—which you must love ere it will seem worthy of your love. Women too, whose voice on literature counts

as well as that of men—and in a light literature counts for more than that of men—women, such as we know them, such as they are likely to be, ever prefer a delicate unreality to a true or firm art. A dressy literature, an exaggerated literature seem to be fated to us. These are our curses, as other times had theirs.

"And yet
Think not the living times forget,
Ages of heroes fought and fell,
That Homer in the end might tell;
O'er grovelling generations past
Upstood the Doric fane at last;
And countless hearts on countless years
Had wasted thoughts, and hopes, and fears,
Rude laughter and unmeaning tears;
Ere England Shakespeare saw, or Rome
The pure perfection of her dome.
Others I doubt not if not we,
The issue of our toils shall see;
Young children gather as their own
The harvest that the dead had shown,
The dead forgotten and unknown."[1]

[1] *The Poems and Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough*, vol. ii., p. 472.

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